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Linda Grace Ludwin, B.A., M.A.

**The One-shot Deal:
Temporary Organizations, UK Feature Film Units, and
Learning Organization Theory**

Offered for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Centre for Technology Strategy

Faculty of Technology

The Open University

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19 December 2003

ABSTRACT

This embedded single case study considers how temporary organizations such as UK feature film production units learn. Units, which cluster around London and are active for less than a year, manufacture pre-financed films such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *The Crying Game*.

Six important learning organization models, three from the UK and three from the USA, were used to think about how film units learn. Primary and secondary data were considered in function of six themes. Three were learning organization themes: (i) learning is tied to action, (ii) problem solving, and (iii) commitment to learning. Further powerful themes emerged during coding: (iv) temporariness, (v) employment practices, and (vi) networking.

Fieldwork consisted of in-depth interviews with freelances working on UK film units, as well as a range of other primary and secondary sources, including days of observation during the production of *Loaded*, and attendance at a series of British Film Institute seminars on film production issues.

The study concludes that although UK feature film units are epistemic communities, they are not learning organizations.

The combination of being temporary and producing cultural texts conditions most aspects of organizational life and style in UK film units. They are an extreme and idiosyncratic form of temporary organization, designed to thrive in climates of radical change and grounded in a unique historical context.

**This study is dedicated to producer Jon Finn,
who sparked my interest in UK film units.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

DEDICATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1.0	<u>METHODOLOGY</u>	13
1.1	INTRODUCTION	
1.2	METHODOLOGICAL INFLUENCES	
1.2.1	AN EMBEDDED SINGLE-CASE DESIGN	
1.2.2	GROUNDING THEORY	
	<u>Coding</u>	
1.3	RANGE OF SOURCES	
1.4	CONCLUSIONS: METHODOLOGY	
2.0	<u>SIX MODELS OF THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION</u>	30
2.1	INTRODUCTION	
2.2	PETER M. SENGE’S MODEL	
2.2.1	COMMENT	
2.3	DOROTHY A. LEONARD’S MODEL	
2.3.1	COMMENT	
2.4	DAVID A. GARVIN’S MODEL	
2.4.1	COMMENT	
2.5	MIKE PEDLER, JOHN BURGOYNE AND TOM BOYDELL’S MODEL	
2.5.1	COMMENT	
2.6	ALAN JONES AND CHRIS HENDRY’S MODEL	
2.6.1	COMMENT	
2.7	BOB GARRATT’S MODEL	
2.7.1	COMMENT	

2.8	THE SIX MODELS CONSIDERED	
2.9	BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT EDUCATION, MODE 2 KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING ORGANIZATION THEORY	
2.9.1	MODE 2 KNOWLEDGE	
2.10	CONCLUSIONS: LEARNING ORGANIZATION THEORY	
3.0	<u>THE UK FEATURE FILM INDUSTRY: PRODUCING A FEATURE</u>	111
3.1	INTRODUCTION	
3.2	THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF UK FILM PRODUCTION	
3.3	FILM PRODUCTION AS A CULTURAL INDUSTRY	
3.4	TRENDS IN UK FILM PRODUCTION	
3.5	WORKING TITLE FILMS	
3.6	ARTISANAL FILM MAKING	
3.7	TECHNOLOGY AND PRODUCTION: DIGITAL FILM	
3.8	PRODUCING A FEATURE FILM	
3.8.1	THE PRODUCTION PROCESS	
3.8.2	PRE-PRE-PRODUCTION	
3.8.3	LINKS BETWEEN FILM AND TELEVISION: FILMFOUR	
3.8.4	PRE-PRODUCTION	
3.8.5	PRODUCTION	
3.8.6	POST-PRODUCTION	
3.9	WORKING IN A FILM UNIT	
3.9.1	CAREER PROGRESSION IN FILM PRODUCTION	
3.10	UK GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING AND MANAGEMENT IN FEATURE FILM UNITS	
3.11	CONCLUSIONS: THE UK FEATURE FILM PRODUCTION INDUSTRY	
4.0	<u>TWO UK PRODUCTION CASE STUDIES: THE CRYING GAME AND FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL</u>	168
4.1	INTRODUCTION	
4.2	<i>THE CRYING GAME</i> (1992)	
4.3	<i>FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL</i> (1994)	

4.4 CONCLUSIONS: TWO PRODUCTION CASE STUDIES

5.0 HIGH SPEED, HIGH PRESSURE LEARNING IN UK FILM UNITS

187

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 WORK IN A TEMPORARY ORGANIZATION

Closure

Health and Safety

5.1.2 SUMMARY: WORK IN A TEMPORARY ORGANIZATION

5.2 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

5.2.1 ACTION LEARNING

Synopsis: Action Learning

5.2.2 PROBLEM SOLVING

Synopsis: Problem Solving

5.2.3 COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

Reflective Practice

Learning outside the unit

Synopsis: Commitment to Learning

5.2.4 SUMMARY: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

5.3 EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

5.3.1 SETTING THE TONE

5.3.2 WORK GROUPS AND SEMI-PERMANENT WORK GROUPS

5.3.3 SUPPLIERS AND SUB-CONTRACTORS

5.3.4 TEAMWORK

5.3.5 COMPETENCE

5.3.6 ADVANCEMENT

5.3.7 EMPLOYMENT AS A REWARD

5.3.8 WORD OF MOUTH

5.3.9 SUMMARY: EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

5.4 NETWORKING

5.4.1 NETWORKING IN

Networking In: The Script

Networking In: The Production Office

Synopsis: Networking In

5.4.2 NETWORKING OUT

Networking Out: Formal Mechanisms

Networking Out: Informal Networks

Synopsis: Networking Out

5.4.6 COLLABORATION AND COMPETITION

5.4.7 CASE STUDY: TUNNELS, PHEASANTS AND CRANES

5.4.8 SUMMARY: NETWORKING

**5.5 CONCLUSIONS: HIGH SPEED, HIGH PRESSURE LEARNING
IN UK FILM UNITS**

**6.0 HOW TEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS UK FILM 269
UNITS LEARN**

6.1 LEARNING ORGANIZATION THEORY

6.2 BEING TEMPORARY

6.2.1 LEARNING IN FILM UNITS

6.2.2 EXPERTNESS IN UK FILM UNITS

**6.2.3 TEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS: NEW WAYS OF
WORKING?**

6.2.4 SUMMARY: BEING TEMPORARY

6.3 FUTURE RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.3.1 OTHER TEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

6.3.2 TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION

**6.3.3 PROBLEM SOLVING, NETWORKING, AND NETWORKS
IN UK FILM UNITS**

**6.3.4 THE HISTORY OF INDEPENDENT FILM PRODUCTION
IN THE UK**

6.3.5 THE APPOINTMENT OF UNIT ARCHIVISTS

6.3.6 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

6.3.7 FILM COUNCIL TRAINING INITIATIVES

6.3.8 GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

6.4 THE ONE-SHOT DEAL: FILM UNITS ARE DISTINCTIVE

7.0	<u>APPENDICES</u>	298
7.1	APPENDIX A: SAMPLE FIELDWORK INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	
7.2	APPENDIX B: LIST OF FIELDWORK DOCUMENTATION	
8.0	<u>LIST OF REFERENCES</u>	307

INTRODUCTION

During the 1980s and early 1990s I was placing B.A. (Hons) arts management undergraduates on secondment with a variety of British arts organizations¹. I had a number of students with a special interest in film, video and television production, and over the course of a seven year period, I arranged many placements in those sectors of the UK's cultural industries. Part of my job involved visiting students on placement, and assessing the organizational case studies they wrote as part of their academic work. I immediately became fascinated with feature film production units: weird temporary organizations that were generated either by production companies or by independent producers solely to make a single feature film, and then discarded.

Harvard economist Richard Caves (2001, p. 103) calls the way in which films are financed “one-shot deals involving many specialists” to convey the temporary and limited nature of the involvement of all parties, hence the use of the phrase in the title of this dissertation. Daskalaki and Blair (2002), who write about UK film units, explain: “This ambiguous and complex activity...[has] been conducted in temporary organisations, with organisational structures and resources being constructed and assembled on a recurrent but temporal basis (DeFillipi and Arthur, 1988)” (p. 8). Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm (2002) have described projects (which they also refer to as temporary organizations) as “organized in terms of an effort that is running from ‘unfinished’ to ‘finished’” (p. 20). Ekstedt (2002) has described temporary organizations as “having the three t’s in common: time, task and team. Projects are mostly defined by the task they are supposed to fulfill during a specific time” (p. 61).

Within a period of less than a year, each unit ranges from employing a single individual to employing many hundreds of specialists, and uses an astounding range of sub-contractors for the provision of goods and services. Unit numbers dramatically

¹ The spelling of *organization*: As learning organization theorists universally use the USA ‘z’ spelling of this and associated words (such as organize and organized), these have been adopted here and used throughout, except where sources using the UK’s ‘s’ form are quoted.

decrease during the period of time after filming, when editing and sound work take place, dwindling to the handful of staff necessary to deliver the finished film and wind up the company. Once a production ends and people take up their next jobs, individuals who worked together in a particular unit are instantly dispersed. In terms of finance, at minimum - on a very low budget feature - upwards of a million pounds is spent within the same brief time frame, and more usually it is many millions of pounds. A unit's business can take place anywhere in the world, and often does, sometimes on locations in many different countries during the course of an eight or ten week shoot. Feature films can involve any type of equipment or physical setting imaginable. Every unit faces unique logistical, practical, financial and artistic demands generated by its particular script.

These extreme temporary organizations, with their nomadic, self-employed personnel moving relentlessly from one temporary organization to the next, often changing job descriptions along the way, seemed to represent the ultimate in out-placement, contract culture and just-in-time philosophy. They have been described as a kind of organizational vanguard, leading the way to the future of work in Europe and the USA.

On film units, most cast and crew members meet for the first time at a social occasion. The next day the production is in full swing. How do people who work in temporary organizations know how to work together? How does learning take place so rapidly and effectively in such transient settings? What happens to the learning in a temporary organization when it ceases to exist? Is learning transferred from one temporary organization to another, and if so, how? These were the questions that fascinated me and which helped me to formulate my central research question: *how do temporary organizations such as film units learn?*

In 1992 I was introduced to systems thinking and to Peter Senge's ideas. His *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) linked a particular form of systems thinking with ideas about organizational learning to popularise a new paradigm, the learning organization. Senge's populist spin was compelling, and I wondered if learning organization theory could be relevant to temporary organizations such as the feature film production units which had so intrigued me.

Since film units push the concept of an organization to its limit, I suspected that the radical ways in which these entities are organised and managed might stretch models of the learning organization. Perhaps in such temporary, fluid organizations, notorious for functioning across organizational boundaries, more interactive and unusual ways of learning would be found.

This research project began as an attempt to improve my comprehension of how temporary organizations work. Caves (2001) says, “While economists have been game to think about public policy toward creative activities, they have largely ignored questions about why those activities are organised the way they are.” (p. 1). Organizational issues arising from the way in which feature films are manufactured in the UK - a process that is surprisingly invisible - interest me. In this study, I set out to discover how temporary organizations such as film units learn, using learning organization theory as a lens to focus my enquiry.

As I explain in chapter 1, in order to understand how such organizations learn, it proved necessary to consider how the UK feature film production sector as a whole learns. In this study, the sector as a whole functions as a type 2 critical case, indeed an extreme case, with 2 embedded productions and 10 embedded individuals, testing the strength of a significant management theory, learning organization theory (Yin, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The primary qualitative data generated for this study was extremely rich and varied, and could not be considered fully in a single 100,000 word study. Difficult decisions regarding the focus and methodology of this research project had to be made. Various other approaches to studying learning in temporary organizations such as UK feature film production units were considered, but the methodology which has been employed enabled me to explore the genesis, context and application of a contemporary body of management theory, learning organization theory, and to examine in detail how temporariness shapes learning in an important sector of the UK’s cultural industries, feature film production. The sector is chaotic, complex and rapidly changing. Film units, with life spans of less than a year, demand rapid learning. Opportunities for

organizational learning and knowledge transfer should be abundant in this sector: if learning organizations exist, they should flourish in UK film production.

Using grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I was able to code data for strong shared learning organization themes, and also to consider powerful themes that arose independently across the sub-units of analysis and in secondary material as well. Compelling literal replication was achieved within the elements of the case. Indeed, this case meets most of Yin's criteria for an exemplary case (1989, pp. 146 – 151).

Finally, I am grateful to Dr. David Wield, Professor of Innovation and Development at the Open University and Co-Director of both the International Development Centre and the ESRC Innogen Centre, for supervising this research. His input broadened the scope of my thinking in important ways.

CHAPTER ONE

METHODOLOGY

Theory becomes *local theory*; knowledge in a social context arises when one is able to deal with a specific situation. In a discussion on action science, Gustavsen and Sorensen⁴² also place considerable emphasis on the importance of local theory; in their view, it is perhaps the only type of theory that can be created in social situations. Cronbach states that ‘when we give proper weight to local conditions, any generalization is a working hypothesis, not a conclusion.’⁴³ In a true holistic sense, Argyris et al. ‘seek both generalizability and the attention to the individual case.’ (Gummesson, 2000, p. 96)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The central question of this study is: how do temporary organizations such as film units learn? In order to answer it, I used a range of methodological approaches that were appropriate to the question and to the context of fieldwork. This strategy allowed me to take a qualitative approach to what has turned out to be a complicated, transdisciplinary, heterogeneous research issue, using learning organization theory as a lens to focus my enquiry.

1.2 METHODOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

When I began my study, it seemed firmly located within the modernist tradition: my work was to be “directed towards elaborating theories whose approximations to reality are composed in the form of *a priori* hypotheses that are verified or refuted against the referent of observed reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).” (Locke, 2001, p. 7). Learning organization theory was to be interrogated in function of temporary organizations such as

UK feature film production units¹.

However, in so far as this research has been characterised by “an interest in understanding the world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Locke, 2001, p.8), through methods of observation and ethnographic interviewing, it is fair to describe it as interpretative, “highlight[ing] the way in which meaning making or interpretative activities construct and shape organizational and management realities.” (Locke, p. 10). Those elements which “focus attention on power interests - whose voices have a place and whose voices are excluded - in current knowledge making practices” (Locke, p. 11) fall within the postmodern paradigm.

The grounded theory procedures and techniques of Strauss and Corbin (1990) influenced those aspects of analysis which were relevant to trans-disciplinary, heterogeneous mode 2 management research, as did Locke (2001) in her discussion of the relevance of grounded theory to contemporary mode 2 management research and Argyris & Schön’s (1978) discussion of organizational deuterolearning.

In describing the shift from traditional modes of knowledge production to knowledge produced in Mode 2, which proposes heterogeneous, transdisciplinary modes of problem solving in contexts of application, Gibbons et al. (1994) raise many important issues that are directly relevant to how learning takes place in temporary organizations such as film units. I have also drawn on the work of Starkey and Madan (2001), Huff and Huff (2001), Pettigrew (2001) and Starkey (2001) in writing about management research and UK business schools.

¹ In this study the term *feature film production unit* refers to those temporary organizations which manufacture films. Technically, they are production companies, but so is Working Title Films (discussed in chapter three), a mini-major production company that operates on an entirely different scale. Therefore, I have chosen to refer to feature film production units or film units or production units or units when writing about that combination of cast, crew and additionally contracted firms and individuals providing goods and services, which collectively fabricates a film within the structure of a temporary limited company. Film unit can be taken to refer only to the production phase of the process - it is not used in that sense here.

In important respects this study has been ethnographic, and I have drawn on Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson's *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (1983). In terms of field relations, a former student of mine, at the time of my fieldwork a production manager in a UK film unit, introduced me to other freelances working in film units and offered useful advice about how best to win their confidence. Gummesson (2000) describes this kind of key "efficient and benevolent informant" (p. 33) as a *gatekeeper*. While I was doing fieldwork, my gatekeeper and I started a London-based film production company of which I am still a company director. Therefore, in terms of my *field role* (the term that Hammersley & Atkinson (1983) use to describe the researcher's position with respect to his or her surroundings) whilst interviewing participants, although I was not a participant observer, my work was closely aligned to the field.

The one-to-one interviews I conducted were solicited insider accounts of working and managerial practices and beliefs within film units, and included a number of inbuilt non-directive opportunities for each participant to "talk at length, and in his or her own terms" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 110). Hammersley and Atkinson stress the need to use open, non-directive questions and these were a feature of my research design. Interviews took place in a variety of settings, including several respondents' homes and at Walton Hall. Respondent validation was employed, as informants were provided with transcripts of their own interviews and invited to comment. None did.

During the process of analysis, the research design enabled triangulation, "an attempt to relate different sorts of data in such a way as to counteract various possible threats to the validity of...analysis" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1991, p. 199). In terms of theory, I examined how validly a macro-formal body of theory, learning organization theory, could be applied to an extreme organizational form by conducting micro-substantive research on film production units (Hammersley & Atkinson). My research design was intended to be abductive, iterative between the deductive and the inductive: "Deductive research primarily tests existing theory, whereas inductive research primarily generates new theory." (Gummesson, 2000, p. 64).

Research for this dissertation was conducted in and around London. However, people working on British film units are likely to have worked on non-UK features because the UK industry functions as a global centre of relatively inexpensive but high quality production skills, particularly for films financed from the USA. In any case, with such short production cycles and relatively low numbers of features being made in the UK, international mobility is a fact of life for those working in film. Therefore, any distinctively British management approach to film production is unlikely to exist, especially given the history of film production in the UK, a topic discussed in chapter three.

1.2.1 AN EMBEDDED SINGLE-CASE DESIGN

My primary methodological influence was Robert K. Yin's (1984) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. The special nature of film units as temporary organizations made the study loci important. In order to consider whether or not film units possessed the characteristics of learning organizations, I used an adaptation of the case study methodology put forward in Yin. He suggests that a case study approach as a research strategy is well suited to organizational and management studies (p. 13), a point of view which is also supported by Locke (2001). As John Van Maanen, Erwin H. Schell Professor of Organization Studies, Behavioral Policy Science, Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, points out in his introduction to Evert Gummesson's *Qualitative Methods in Management Research* (2000):

It is helpful to recall that qualitative analysis was the primary means by which virtually all social science research was conducted up to about mid-century. This is certainly true for management research which until the early 1960s was tightly linked to a case study approach. From the descriptive and prescriptive writings of Frederick Taylor, to the anthropological studies of shop floor behavior at Western Electric's Hawthorne plant near Chicago, management research rested largely on sustained, explicit, methodical observation of work situations in their naturally

occurring contexts.... As the new century begins, a rather widespread resurgence of qualitative work is occurring across disciplines as well as across applied domains. Qualitative work is back and back with a vengeance as many of the promises associated with quantitative study have come up empty. (pp. ix-x)

The case study approach “allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events - such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes,” (Yin, 1984, p. 14). It is particularly appropriate to use a case study approach to research when “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control.” (Yin, p. 20). Yin points out the case study's ability as a form to include consideration of documents, artefacts, interviews and observations and he provides a technical definition:

A case study is an empirical inquiry that: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. (p. 23)

Case study methodology fit my research question well, and built on my previous experience of postgraduate fieldwork, which consisted of an ethnographically-inclined multiple case study for an M.A. thesis.

The case study approach is holistic. It allows for the investigation of real life issues in an empirical way. It can be used to generate theory, and to generalise about theoretical frameworks. These factors all fitted my research agenda.

I seriously considered, but excluded, an extended observational case study research design on the following grounds:

- Open access to every stage of the production process of a feature film would not be possible to arrange.
- Following the days I spent observing a feature film unit at work, I was not convinced that *watching* management was the most effective way of *studying* management. Observation required a substantial amount of subsequent

explanation and contextualization before accurate interpretations could be made, thus increasing the time commitment required by me and my key informants for this approach, as well as its complexity. This was not practical.

Instead, I decided to use a multiple case study relating what actually happened within British film units to what was supposed to happen within successful organizations according to learning organization models.

I defined a successful film unit as a film unit which had produced a film that was distributed internationally to commercial cinemas, a film which did well at the box office, and which received international critical approval. Learning organization theory would provide propositions against which my fieldwork data would be compared: my intention was to link data to propositions through pattern-matching (Yin, 1984, p. 33, pp. 109-113), whereby several pieces of information from each case would be related to the body of theoretical propositions shared by learning organization theorists.

My design was intended to be multiple in the sense that targeted informants included groups of individuals who had participated in the same film units. Each unit was to form a separate case. Two British feature films were to be the cases around which interviews would be conducted: *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, produced by Polygram/Working Title in 1994 and *The Crying Game*, produced by Palace/Channel 4 in 1992. For the purposes of this study, I defined a *British film* as one with a principal UK film unit, backed by at least 51% British finance, and with principal photography taking place in the UK. I defined *commercial* as a film that achieved mainstream cinematic release.

I also had an opportunity to observe a day of pre-production and a day during principal photography of a low budget UK/New Zealand co-production (*Loaded*, working title *Bloody Weekend*), and initially I hoped that this film could provide a third case. However, it did not meet the criteria described above. In spite of this, the *Loaded* observation work proved valuable in contextualising other data, and it is referred to in chapter three.

Opting for interviews with a range of managers who were functional specialists, I intended my fieldwork to consist of interviews with people I had identified as fulfilling key management roles in the two case study units: the executive producer, producer, director, production manager, and heads of department (for example, the location manager, production designer, director of photography and art director) from these two British films, giving a total of around eleven interviews per production. The two complete sets of interviews were to produce a snapshot of the UK industry during the 1990s as well as separate case studies.

It transpired that it was impossible to arrange a full complement of interviews for either of the film units I had identified. I had underestimated how difficult it would be to track such mobile individuals, or to obtain their cooperation. The biggest cluster of informants I gathered consisted of four members of one film unit. Of the other unit, two members participated in this study.

In addition to the fieldwork mentioned above, I interviewed four further functional specialists who had worked on many feature film units: three production managers, and a producer.

All informants who completed in-depth interviews for this study were promised anonymity. They were assigned pseudonyms for this reason, and certain details have been obscured or altered to protect identities. The ten participants (with the job titles they held at the time I interviewed them) were:

Ann, producer

Bob, production manager

Don, location manager

Ed, production manager

Huw, director of photography

Jim, production manager

Kay, production executive
Pam, production co-ordinator
Sue, production manager/coordinator
Tim, production manager

Looking at the 2002 CVs of the ten participants as published on the website *Internet Movie Database* (<http://www.imdb.com/>), all but one are still active in UK-based feature film production, continuing to succeed as freelance contract workers (with the exception of Kay and Jim, who are employed) in a highly competitive marketplace. Individuals' credits subsequent to participating in this study include a mixture of creative and financial successes, such as (amongst many others): *My Little Eye* (2002), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2002), *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones* (2002), *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), *Gladiator* (2000), *102 Dalmatians* (2000), *Billy Elliot* (2000), *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), *High Fidelity* (2000), *The Mummy* (1999), *Notting Hill* (1999) *Hilary and Jackie* (1998), and *Little Voice* (1998). These are people at the top of their professions.

The retrospective approach to interviewing I employed meant that I was interviewing participants after their experience of working on one or the other of the target units. Since completion of the target films, all the informants had worked on a variety of units, and in many cases had advanced up the industry ladder, so that individuals, at the time of their interview with me, often held a different job title to the one they had while working on the target unit. Because people freelancing for film units move on very rapidly, the amount of detailed, specific material on *Four Weddings and a Funeral* or *The Crying Game* that informants could provide was sparse. In most instances, what knowledge informants had was tacit rather than explicit, and could only be teased out to a limited extent. This combination of circumstances forced me to reconsider my research design.

As I carried out my fieldwork and attended a series of British Film Institute seminars on issues in film production, it became increasingly clear that the appropriate elements of analysis were not film production units. The more that I listened to people who worked in

film production units, the more I came to understand that the boundaries of films units are so porous that it is far more useful to conceptualise the entire sector as a single entity, rather than considering film production units one by one. After all, freelances spend only a short period of time within each unit. Research by Blair, Grey and Randle (2001) showed that in the year prior to their case study film going into production “the average number of projects crew members completed was five. The number of jobs completed varied from one through to eleven....the average film worker re-enters the labour market very frequently in the space of a year.” (p. 6).

It is not that boundaries between units do not exist: certainly they do. Units differ greatly in important ways. However, because of rapid turnover and shared personnel, when Jim was asked if benchmarking was used to compare the performance of units, he said, “The other companies you're measuring against is yourself, really.”(1993, p. 23).

Of the study's ten participants, nine specifically discussed the significance of working on a freelance basis for temporary organizations. The tenth referred to it tangentially.

People working in feature film production consider the industry as a whole to be the salient entity to which they relate, not the individual film units to which they are attached for such short periods of time. The industry endures, not the unit. Individuals continue to freelance within it throughout the course of their working lives, but each unit only provides a few weeks or at most a few months of work, depending on an individual's specialism and the requirements of the particular production. Units are temporary: continuity is provided by shared understandings held by those working in the sector, not by the units for which they work. Continuing relationships such as occupational work groups - semi-permanent work groups - and personal networks are also important.

This turns the stereotypical organization, where it is assumed that the organization will endure as individuals come and go, on its head. The significance of temporary units is

considered in greater depth in chapter five, “High Speed, High Pressure Learning in UK Film Units.”

In the research design of this study, each of the study’s ten participants became an individual sub-unit in her or his own right, and these sub-units are considered within the context of the main case, the UK’s feature film production industry in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century. Rather than arranging material by participant, though, I chose to use three specific themes from learning organization theory, as well as three themes that emerged during fieldwork, as organizing principles. Within the embedded case study design, my informants functioned as a set of sub-units of the UK feature film industry. This approach allowed me to consider managerial issues in film units in operational detail, since every individual, having worked in many film units and having held a range of job titles, could discuss issues with the benefit of being able to compare and contrast practices, experiences and values from unit to unit and role to role. It also meant that preliminary interviews, conducted with personal contacts working in feature film production, and amongst the most interesting, could be considered on an equal basis with later fieldwork.

Chapter four is comprised of two intermediary units of analysis: the two units I had originally intended to focus on, *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *The Crying Game*. Rather than being the main focus of my fieldwork, these sub-units of analysis are used as examples of temporary organizations with contrasting styles and experiences, each having produced a highly successful film.

Revisiting my research design was a part of ensuring the ultimate validity of this study. Gummesson (2000), quoting Hagg (1982), makes the point that “validity is seen ‘as a continuous process that is integrated with theory and that requires the researcher to continuously assess his assumptions, revise his results, retest his theories and models and reappraise the given limitations that have been set for the study.’” (p. 93).

According to Yin (1984), in choosing cases it can be useful to choose those which are obviously important, and others which are very different. It can also be useful to choose some units which are borderline. Strong knowledge of the sector being studied is important in informing the researcher's choice of cases to be studied. Focusing on a range of specialist managers at different stages of their careers, some of whom had worked together on the most artistically and financially successful films ever made in the UK, as well as on other features which had never been released (and therefore could be considered to have failed), was a highly effective way of exploring the rich and complex nature of production units. I also looked at a number of secondary sources of case study material concerning the production of features in the UK and the USA including Jake Eberts and Terry Ilt's (1990) *My Indecision is Final: The Rise and Fall of Goldcrest Films*; Jane Hamsher's (1997) *Killer Instinct*, the story behind the production of *Natural Born Killers*; and Julie Salamon's (1991) *The Devil's Candy*, an account of the production of *Bonfire of the Vanities*. This non-technical literature supplemented my interviews and direct observations.

Like Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), Yin (1984) suggests that replication strengthens findings - if findings are replicated in case after case, it is similar to repeating a laboratory experiment with the same results each time, allowing for theoretical replication. Considering each participant and intermediary unit as subunits of analysis more accurately reflected the nature of the film production sub-sector, and allowed for the possibility of substantial replication.

1.2.2 GROUNDED THEORY

I began my data analysis with "some prior specification of existing theory to narrow and direct...[my] analysis." (Locke, 2001, p. 102). Strauss and Corbin's *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (1990) provided useful guidance in constructing my research design and in considering both primary and secondary data. I used technical literature (i.e. published accounts of learning

organization theory and practice) to provide “concepts and relationships that ...[were] checked out against actual data” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 50). Strauss and Corbin say, “If one is interested in extending an already existing theory, then one might begin with the existing theory and attempt to uncover how it applies to new and varied situations, as differentiated from those situations to which it was originally applied.” (p. 51). This was the nature of my initial research design. I used the technical literature to “derive a list of questions that you want to ask of your respondents or that guide your initial observations” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 52).

This theoretical orientation guided my case study analysis, and I hoped that it would be possible to make strong “level one inference” analytic generalizations (Yin, 1984, pp. 38 - 40) because multiple cases would provide a strong basis for the replication of findings. There was also to be an element of explanation-building (Yin, pp. 113-115). Locke (2001) points out that “A different angle to the notion of enlivening mature theoretical perspectives is that use of a grounded theory approach can make sure that our theories stay current with the organizational realities they purport to explain.” (p. 97). She notes that Strauss (1970) indicates “grounded theory could be used to extend previous theory and make it more dense by filling in what had been left out - that is by extending and refining its existing theoretical categories and relationships.” (Locke, p.103). On these bases I hoped it would be possible to expand or extend learning organization theory.

My thesis is that the central tenets of learning organization theory, developed by academic consultants who link success with organizational endurance in the context of very large private sector organizations, will not be wholly applicable to temporary organizational forms such as film production units, and factors other than those identified within the various learning organization models may prove central to the success of film units. I hope to make a contribution to the development of learning organization theory by better understanding temporary organizations.

Coding

Whilst coding I was deliberately looking for three learning organization themes which stood out in learning organization theory and which all six models described in chapter two share: (i) learning is tied to action, (ii) problem solving and (iii) reflective practice. Simultaneously, my intention was to remain open to learning-related themes that the data itself suggested. It transpired that personally preparing verbatim transcripts of the interviews, which had all been audio taped, was a great boon, even if it did not seem so at the time of transcription! I listened to those tapes repeatedly and by the time I coded fieldwork material, I already knew the terrain well. The interview material is rich and dense. A study of this length can only deal with those facets relevant to its principal research question: how do temporary organizations such as film units learn?

In addition to coding data under the themes mentioned in the previous paragraph, three other powerful themes emerged from the data during the coding process: (iv) working in a temporary organization; (v) employment practices in units; and (vi) networking inside and outside the unit. Data were coded for these too, and various related sub-themes.

My intention in coding was to allow the data to speak to me; to express clearly those elements of data that explain how temporary organizations learn in the specific context of UK feature film production; and to use learning organization constructs where they were appropriate, but never to force them.

The process of coding was a long and detailed one, with separate passes through each transcript for codes and sub-codes. Each category reflected a different aspect of learning organization theory and learning in temporary organizations. Frequently, a number of issues were tangled together in a single piece of data, and difficult decisions had to be made about where to assign it. At various points codes were combined, or split, or dropped, because they were not central to the research design of this study. For example,

blame culture as a learning inhibitor was a very rich, amusing vein running through the interviews, but its inclusion could not be justified as core to the research question.

1.3 RANGE OF SOURCES

In undertaking this study, I attempted to utilise a full range of evidence. It is documented in sections 7.2² and 8.

In this chapter I use a variety of secondary sources to explain how I undertook my research. In chapter two, again using secondary sources, I investigate learning organization theories, and identify important common features across six models of the learning organization, three from the UK and three from the USA. The second chapter also includes a discussion of mode 2 learning and how it is connected to learning organization theory, drawing from secondary sources.

Chapter three provides context and background: it explains how film units fit into the British film and television sector, how they are structured, and what they do. It includes primary data, incorporating information from the interviews described below under chapter five. In 1993 I spent two twelve hour days observing a film unit producing the low budget feature film *Loaded* (working title *Bloody Weekend*). Data from this observational fieldwork are referred to in chapter three. During 1996 I attended a series of

² Fieldwork documentation: American Psychological Association Publication Manual guidelines (2001), which were consulted in formatting the references for this study, suggest that fieldwork notes should not be included in lists of references because they are not recoverable data, but rather cited in the text as personal communications with the surname and initials of the communicator given on each occasion. For the sake of brevity, and because of issues regarding the confidentiality of some participants, fieldwork documentation has been listed in 7.2, Appendix B, and participants are referred to in the body of this text by pseudonym.

BFI/PACT seminars on film production: each seminar focused on production issues related to a single British feature. Panellists included directors, producers and other key film unit managers from that film. Notes from these seminars contribute to chapter three, which also includes material from secondary sources.

Chapter four examines two embedded case studies of British films from a production perspective: *The Crying Game* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. It is based partly on primary interviews, and partly on secondary sources.

Chapter five analyses my fieldwork data. Quotations in this chapter are taken from fully transcribed audio-taped interviews with a variety of experienced freelance managers working in UK feature film production. These took place between 1993 and 1997. Every participant in this study, having worked in many film units, and having held a range of job titles, was able to discuss issues with the benefit of being able to compare and contrast practices and values between units and between a range of jobs within units.

For the interviews on which this chapter is based, I developed a standard set of protocol questions which I used in open-ended interviews with individuals who work in feature film production. I based these on the kinds of questions I imagined that Dorothy Leonard might have asked in the field to generate the data for her 1992 case study published in the *Sloan Management Review*: "The Factory as a Learning Laboratory". A sample set of questions is included as Appendix A in section 7.1. These questions were designed to evoke responses under each of the three themes I identified as common to a shared learning organization model in chapter two. However, the language used in the questions was not the language of the model. For example, there seemed little point in asking respondents about collaborative groupwork. Instead, I used questions such as "What is it like working with people in this industry?" and "What is it that turns the many different individuals who have been recruited for different skills and abilities into a team? Can you give an example?"

Each of six themes is supported with fieldwork evidence. Replication for the fieldwork findings in this dissertation was generally good, and in some sections excellent. Some findings were also confirmed by secondary sources. Where there was replication internal to the study, not all participants are quoted in full. Where one voice represented many similar comments, it was pressed into service to do so, in the interests of brevity. The exception to this practice is found in section 5.1.1, “Work in a Temporary Organization”, where participants are quoted more fully because of the primary importance of the issue.

Finally, chapter six offers my conclusions as to how temporary organizations such as film units learn. This last chapter introduces new secondary material on themes such as the nature of expertness and temporariness.

1.4 CONCLUSIONS: METHODOLOGY

There was a terrible moment during fieldwork when I realised that I was not going to achieve two complete, detailed sets of interviews, one for each case study film, or even come close. This seemed like disaster. My research plans were in ruins. Some individuals were simply not interested in being interviewed. Others were not available, and one or two simply couldn't be located at the time. The people that I did interview had only the sketchiest recollections of the target units I wanted to hear about. I selected an alternative film and tried to set up a slate of interviews, and fared no better.

I was forced to reappraise my research approach. This turned out to be a very good thing. When I studied the interview transcripts, and thought deeply about what freelances had told me of their experiences on UK film units, I realised that the data demanded a different approach, an embedded case study approach, properly to explore how film units learn. In retrospect, I'm glad I couldn't achieve those perfect sets of interviews - I might never have considered the relationship of freelances to temporary units, the industry and one another in the same ways if I had.

How do temporary organizations such as film units learn? I will be examining key learning themes by analysing learning organization literature and through the embedded case study that formed the basis of my fieldwork.

CHAPTER TWO

SIX MODELS OF THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION

A model is something you build in the hope that it will work as intended. A model has to be based on the real world, or else the relations between its parts will not lead to its working as intended. (Thomas & Chataway, 1999, p. 19)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

How do temporary organizations such as film units learn? To answer this question, I selected a body of management theory that was of great popular and academic interest in the early 1990s, learning organization theory, which I used as a lens through which to examine temporary organizations. The learning organization is a potentially useful idea, but one which needs careful evaluation. The concept formed a springboard for my research.

Instead of a normal survey of all key literature, I decided to focus on a few core references and look in detail at six important theorists (or groups of theorists) and their learning organization models. I considered their backgrounds: the contexts from which they write. I was trying to understand what makes them tick as management theorists, consultants and academics.

Timothy Clark and David Greatbatch (2002) have written a fascinating article, “Collaborative Relationships in the Creation and Fashioning of Management Ideas: Gurus, Editors and Managers,” about how management ideas are popularised:

The management advice industry is an interrelated community of knowledge entrepreneurs and organizations which include management consultants, management gurus, business schools and mass media organizations. Each of these

groups is concerned with the creation, production and dissemination of ideas and techniques to managers. (p. 129)

They suggest that successful management gurus collaborate with:

...a range of professional groups during the course of developing, disseminating and revising their ideas. These groups include book editors and publishers, fellow consultants, academics and managers (in their capacity as clients or research subjects). The full extent of the role of these 'support groups' is often hidden from view or acknowledged only briefly.... Whilst they are critical to the success and popularity of the gurus' ideas their role has been completely overlooked. (Clark & Greatbatch, p. 130)

They quote Carson et al. as suggesting that the average shelf life of a management idea has diminished from fifteen years in the 1970s to less than three years in the 1990s (p.141), and identify "*Conventions for the Presentation of the Gurus' Ideas*" (p. 137 - 138) intended to minimise publishers' risk, such as "stress on storytelling," the use of visual metaphors, and advice to write simple, short texts which can be purchased in airports and read on short flights. The gurus they interviewed "identified the following factors as important to the successful presentation of their ideas: their immediate accessibility; their visual nature; their universal applicability; their relevance to practitioners; and proven practicality" (p. 139). Publications such as the *Harvard Business Review* are used to test and refine ideas in the marketplace prior to the publication of a book (p. 140).

Management gurus build credibility by:

...referring either to named managers or organizations that have supported and contributed to the development of their ideas. Thus, when they describe their network, the identity of managers and organizations with whom they have worked is rarely left anonymous.... The implication of this is that if these people and organizations that their audience esteems are successful after doing what the guru identifies as necessary, then so should they be." (Clark & Greatbatch, 2002, pp. 142 - 143)

These elements can be identified in five of the six learning organization theorists or groups of theorists discussed in this chapter, the exceptions being Jones and Hendry. It was interesting and useful to examine a body of contemporary theory from this perspective, especially because learning organization theory seems to have integrated academics and their host institutions more successfully into the mix than other recent management ideas (Clark & Greatbatch, 2002). This chapter considers why learning organization theory is of particular importance and relevance to business schools.

In examining learning organization theory, I was looking for points of convergence amongst theorists. If common characteristics, behaviours, values or beliefs existed, they should be present in successful temporary organizations such as film units, I thought, since learning organization models claim to be relevant to all types of organization. My intention was to produce fieldwork results that would provide feedback on how temporary organizations learn, and also to generate useful commentary on learning organization theory, having used that body of theory as a conceptual template.

Learning organization theory was developed in response to a perceived climate of increasingly rapid change, including the political, social, technical, cultural, religious and economic dimensions of change, to name but a few. However, Fortune and Hughes point out in “Modern Academic Myths” (1997, p. 125) that although assumptions such as “the rate of change is accelerating” and “complexity is increasing” are:

...frequently deployed to support theories, arguments and debate, it is difficult to detect or establish the empirical evidence or observations that justify them. This lack of evidence is worrying.

To borrow a phrase from Argyris and Schön (1978), a group of *scholarly consultants*, academics who also sell consultancy services, believe that the most important quality any organization can possess in settings of rapid change - more important than the goods it manufactures or the services it delivers - is its ability to learn rapidly in order to adapt appropriately so that it can survive.

When they refer to the learning organization, these theorists are principally referring to learning and knowledge which will benefit the entire organization, and especially to the ways in which knowledge and information are created or imported and then distributed, owned and acted upon by organizations. Mechanisms for learning may be formal (classroom based), informal (sitting by Nellie), groupwork-based (quality circles) or through job-swaps, exchanges, meetings, the internet, word of mouth or visits.

This chapter, then, presents an appraisal of learning organization theory carried out by deconstructing six important learning organization models which have been developed by leading management theorists and academics (or groups of them), three in the USA and three in the UK:

USA

Peter M. Senge, Senior Lecturer, Behavioral Policy Science, Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

Dorothy A. Leonard, William J. Abernathy Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School, Harvard University

David A. Garvin, C. Roland Christensen Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School, Harvard University

UK

Mike Pedler, Revans Professional Fellow, University of Salford; John Burgoyne, Professor, Management School, Lancaster University; and Tom Boydell, Visiting Faculty Member, EuroArab Management School (EAMS) and Council Member of the Association of Teachers of Management

Alan Jones, President, Fairfax University; and Chris Hendry, Centenary Professor in Organizational Behaviour, Associate Dean Research, City University Business School

Bob Garratt, Senior Associate, Judge Institute of Management Studies, University of Cambridge

The theorists who produced the USA models are clustered in Boston, Massachusetts, where they are faculty members of either Harvard or MIT. There is no similar clustering in the UK.

This chapter aims to share constructive insights and to raise a series of issues and questions that need to be addressed in order to develop and strengthen an understanding of how temporary organizations such as film units learn. The connections between learning organization theory, business and management education in the UK and the USA, and Mode 2 Knowledge (M2K) are explored. M2K is concerned with flexible transdisciplinary problem solving.

2.2 PETER M. SENGE'S MODEL

The learning organization exists primarily as a vision in our collective experience and imagination. (Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994, pp. 5 - 6)

Peter Senge's 1990 international best seller *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* popularised the idea of the learning organization. It was followed in 1994 by *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*, in 1999 by *The Dance of Change: The Challenges of Sustaining*

Momentum in Learning Organizations and in 2000 by *Schools That Learn: A Fifth Discipline Fieldbook for Educators, Parents and Everyone Who Cares About Kids*.

In addition to his position as a Senior Lecturer at MIT's Sloan School of Management, Senge is a founding partner of Massachusetts-based consultancy firm Innovation Associates, which specialises in providing leadership and mastery workshops for managers. He was voted one of the "Top Management Gurus" by respondents of an international survey conducted by BusinessWeek during 2001 (Schneider, 2001). *The Fifth Discipline*, his first book, was "cited by Harvard Business Review as one of the seminal management books of the last 75 years" (Karagianis, 1997).

Senge's thinking was profoundly influenced by mentor Jay W. Forrester, Germeshausen Professor Emeritus of Management and Senior Lecturer at the Sloan School of Management, MIT. Others whom he particularly acknowledges as having influenced his thinking about *The Fifth Discipline* include: John Sterman; Jennifer Kemeny; Dan Kim (then a researcher at MIT's Centre for Organizational Learning); Bill Isaacs (Director of MIT's Dialogue Project); Diana Smith; Charlotte Roberts (Innovation Associates); Bryan Smith (Innovation Associates); David Bohm (physicist); Chris Argyris (MIT academic); William O'Brien of Hanover Insurance; Charlie Kiefer, management consultant; Edward Simon, Herman Miller; Ray Stata, CEO of Analog Devices; Bart Bolton, Digital; musician Robert Fritz, Michael Goodman, Donella Meadows (Professor, Dartmouth College); and Arie de Geus, who worked for Shell (Senge, 1990).

Senge principally developed his ideas in the context of large private sector organizations:

Business is the locus of innovation in an open society. Despite whatever hold past thinking may have on the business mind, business has a freedom to experiment missing in the public sector and, often, in non-profit organizations. It also has a clear 'bottom line,' so that experiments can be evaluated, at least in principle, by objective criteria. (1990, p. 15).

He refers to his research programme which involves “leaders from Apple, Ford, Polaroid, Royal Dutch/Shell, and Trammell Crow.” (Senge, p. 16). Shell has paid significant attention to learning organization ideas and Shell staff have written important articles on the subject (de Geus, 1988; Wack, 1985a; Wack, 1985b).

The Fifth Discipline was written for a specialist audience comprising corporate managers, business school academics and students, and management consultants.

Senge has spent a great deal of time in large organizations, talking with senior managers about organizational issues, working with academics and other consultants on organizational design and organizational behaviour matters, and training managers in leadership. His management strategies are based on the transfer of theoretical approaches from one discipline to another: “There are strong examples of the impact of managerial tools and methods supported by bringing a new body of theory to a field where it had not yet been applied.” (Senge et al., 1994, p. 31).

However, Senge’s books do not cite any of his own academic studies based on learning organization fieldwork. It does not seem that Senge has carried out formal research on his ideas about learning organizations, but rather that he is reporting on a body of ideas developed over a substantial period with a group of like-minded people from the private sector, academic institutions and consultancy practices, many of whom have published on their own fieldwork, experiments and theories.

For Senge, learning organizations are created primarily through special applications of “systems dynamics”, a methodology developed at MIT over a period of forty years by Jay Forrester (Senge et al., 1994, p. 30):

At the heart of a learning organization is a shift of mind - from seeing ourselves as separate from the world to connected to the world, from seeing problems as caused by someone else or something ‘out there’ to seeing how our own actions create the problems we experience. (Senge, 1990, pp. 12 - 13)

Why his absolute focus on learning? Senge (1990, p.4) quotes from *Fortune* magazine:

‘The ability to learn faster than your competitors,’ said Arie de Geus, head of planning for Royal Dutch/Shell, ‘may be the only sustainable competitive advantage.’

This places learning at the heart of all commercial activity.

According to Mick Moore, Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex,

The most fundamental conceptual distinction that economists make between types of competition is between (a) a situation where all competitors (‘firms’) use the same technology (so-called ‘neo-classical competition’); and (b) one where they compete mainly by seeking technological superiority over rivals (the so-called ‘Schumpeterian competition’). Both are variants of market competition. (2000, p. 91)

With his concept of learning technologies, Senge implicitly subscribes to a variant of the Schumpeterian model. He proposes that “five new ‘component technologies’ are gradually converging to innovate learning organizations.” (Senge, 1990, p. 6). He describes the five technologies as: first, systems thinking, a conceptual framework for the study of interconnectedness; second, personal mastery, by which he means individual commitment to lifelong learning as a reciprocal commitment between employer and employee; third, mental models, the (computer enabled) testing of assumptions and generalizations about the world and how it works; fourth, building shared vision, the creation of a common corporate identity and set of goals; and finally, team learning: how to promote thinking together and how to recognize patterns within the team that prevent learning.

Of the five, systems dynamics is “the discipline that integrates the [other] disciplines, fusing them into a coherent body of theory and practice” (Senge, 1990, p. 12). Senge considers systems thinking a tool for managing complexity: “[Systems thinking] means organizing complexity into a coherent story that illuminates the causes of problems and

how they can be remedied in enduring ways” (p.128). Chapter five, “High Speed, High Pressure Learning in UK Film Units,” demonstrates that the selection of problems and remedies has political dimensions.

Each discipline is developed in detail in a chapter or chapters, with systems thinking receiving the most coverage. Case studies, for example the failure of People Express Airline (Senge, 1990, pp. 128 - 135), are used extensively to illustrate theoretical points.

Chapters in *The Fifth Discipline* (Senge, 1990) include: (13) “Openness” (concerned with transcending internal politics), (14) “Localness” (moving decision making down the hierarchy), (15) “A Manager’s Time” (how to create time for learning), (16) “Ending the War Between Work and Family” (recognising the needs of the whole employee), (17) “Microworlds: the Technology of the Learning Organization” (testing concepts through computer-generated simulations) and (18) “The Leader’s Work” (new models of leadership).

Senge suggests that any organization can become a learning organization by putting into practice the five disciplines he champions. He co-authored and co-edited *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization* (1994), with Charlotte Roberts (a principal at Innovation Associates), Richard Ross (an organizational consultant), Bryan Smith (president of Innovation Associates of Canada) and Art Kleiner (a consulting editor at the MIT’s Center for Organizational Learning who worked on *The Fifth Discipline*). It provides a selection of further readings and exercises which readers can use to:

...evolve a new type of organization. It will be able to deal with the problems and opportunities of today, and invest in its capacity to enhance tomorrow because its members are continually focusing on enhancing and expanding their collective awareness and capabilities. You can create, in other words, an organization which can learn. (Senge et al., p. 4)

By the end of the 1990s, Senge accepted that his vision of the learning organization was proving difficult to realise. In *The Dance of Change*, written in 1999, he acknowledged:

Even without knowing the statistics, most of us know firsthand that change programs fail. We've seen enough 'flavor of the month' programs 'rolled out' from top management to last a lifetime. We know the cynicism they engender.... The innovative practices advocated by the [change] initiative - be it total quality management, process redesign, or 'building a learning organization' - grow for a while and then stop growing. Maybe they cease altogether. Maybe the initiative persists at a low level, the religion of a small group of 'true believers.' Either way, the initial growth fails to reach its potential. (pp. 6 - 7)

2.2.1 COMMENT

A number of issues arise from Senge's learning organization theory, some directly and others by implication. A key issue for this study is his emphasis on the importance of organizational endurance. Senge is concerned with prolonging organizational lifespans, and he believes that this is a universal aspiration:

Few large corporations live even half as long as a person. In 1983, a Royal Dutch/Shell survey found that one third of the firms in the Fortune '500' in 1970 had vanished.¹ Shell estimated that the average lifetime of the largest industrial enterprises is less than forty years, roughly half the lifetime of a human being! The chances are fifty-fifty that readers of this book will see their present firm disappear during their working career.... But what if the high corporate mortality rate is only a symptom of deeper problems that afflict *all* companies, not just the ones that die? (Senge, 1990, pp. 17 - 18)

Senge has been criticised for presenting systems dynamics, a branch of systems thinking, as systems thinking. Lane and Jackson (1995) produced an annotated bibliography of systems approaches in order to demonstrate the field's breadth and diversity of thinking

in response to the conceptual confusion which ensued following the publication of *The Fifth Discipline*:

The majority of systems dynamicists are in the USA and, prompted by Peter Senge's book (item 40); they had started calling their single subject 'systems thinking'. From the European perspective this usage was bewildering, or looked rather arrogant or just seemed ignorant of the wide range of techniques that shelter beneath the expansive umbrella of that term....Using the term 'systems thinking' in a way which is both imprecise and, apparently, unaware of intellectual antecedents also has the effect of blurring the boundaries between different approaches. Burrell and Morgan (2) expended great effort in discriminating between different approaches to organizational analysis and their comment on systems theories bears repeating: 'The selection of a particular type of analogy to represent a system in advance of a detailed analysis of its structure and mode of operation is akin to prescription in advance of diagnosis. This has been the principal problem with systems analysis in social science.' (p. 68). Sloppy use of the term 'systems thinking' so easily leads people to believe that there is no difference between the works of Forrester and those of, say, Beer and Checkland. 'I learned my systems thinking from Senge', runs the corollary, 'I don't need to repeat the process'. This is false. Being able to do systems thinking in the style of Senge, or even in the style of Forrester, is not the same as the approaches offered by other systems thinkers. It is useful to be able to distinguish between distinct bits of knowledge since we gain in both practical and theoretical ways by being able to compare and contrast them. (p. 218)

A chapter in *The Dance of Change*, "Five Kinds of Systems Thinking," goes some way towards acknowledging this criticism, with discussions of open systems, social systems, system dynamics, process systems and living systems (Roberts, 1999, pp. 137 - 149).

The Fifth Discipline suggests that learning is a positive and pleasurable activity:

Learning organizations are possible because, deep down, we are all learners....

Learning organizations are possible because not only is it our nature to learn but we love to learn. (Senge, 1990, p. 4)

There is no room in Senge's model for learning which is not enjoyable, responsible or ethical. Some learning in film units does not support this point of view. Evidence of destructive learning is presented in chapter five.

Senge has taken the business of applying established theories to new fields very seriously. In *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) and its follow-on publications, he has created a theatre of new ideas for managers: a place where pre-existing academic and consultancy concepts are brokered to a business community increasingly desperate for effective approaches to managing change. Senge introduced the work of renowned colleagues from MIT, people such as Forrester, Isaacs and Argyris, to a new public, and promoted MIT's Center for Organizational Learning as a think-tank for big business. Simultaneously he promoted his own management consultancy company, Innovation Associates (IA) by sharing IA techniques and case studies through the medium of his publications, especially through the *Fieldbook* (1994).

The Fifth Discipline phenomenon created many winners. Fellow academics attracted new followings. MIT attracted more students. Innovation Associates picked up new management consultancy and training contracts. Senge's reputation benefited by association with academic colleagues who had well established research and publication track records. He became a best-selling, fêted author. His stroke of genius as a marketer and as a populariser was to seize on the learning organization idea as an overarching conceptual umbrella under which the academic theories and case studies he collaged together could effectively be grouped and sold in a variety of ways to a voracious mass market.

2.3 DOROTHY A. LEONARD'S MODEL

The steel production process is a weird combination of impressive brute physical force and highly skilled finesse. How can one apply a fragile, academic-sounding term like *learning organization* to a production facility where raw physical power so predominates and where productivity is such a major concern that every second counts? Do these people really think about 'knowledge management'? They do, from the CEO down to the line operator who is standing, stopwatch in palm, persistently trying to better the speed of the rolling mills - just because he thinks it is possible. (Leonard-Barton, 1995, p. 7)

Dorothy A. Leonard is the William J. Abernathy Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School. Previously she taught at the Sloan School of Management, MIT. As a consultant, she has worked with national governments and major corporations (Leonard-Barton, 1995).

In 1992, Leonard (writing as Leonard-Barton) published a powerful case study in the *Sloan Management Review*: "The Factory as a Learning Laboratory." A showcase for her theories of organizational learning, the case concerned a specific project that took place in a Texan steel minimill, Chaparral Steel. Her research for this article was supported by the Division of Research, Harvard Business School (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 36). She credits Gil Preuss (now Assistant Professor, Marketing and Policy Studies, Institute for the Integration of Management and Engineering, Case Western Reserve University) for help in field work at Chaparral (Leonard-Barton, p. 36). The case study is based on extensive interviews with a wide cross section of people who worked at Chaparral Steel, as well as on material Leonard had already published on Chaparral. In it, she cites Senge (1990) (Leonard-Barton, p. 38).

Prior to this publication, Leonard had already established a strong track record of research-based academic publication, including periodicals such as the *Journal of*

Consumer Research (1985), *Research Policy* (1988), *Design Management Journal* (1991) and *Strategic Management Journal* (1992). She had produced case studies for Harvard Business School (where she was an Associate Professor) (1987, 1991) and contributed to edited books (1981, 1990) (Leonard-Barton, 1995, pp. 307 -309, p. 335). After producing “The Factory as a Learning Laboratory”, Leonard continued to publish extensively in journals. By the time *The Wellsprings of Knowledge: Building and Sustaining the Sources of Innovation* was published by Harvard University Press (1995), Professor Leonard had written more than twenty-five articles for books and journals, and dozens of field-based studies (Leonard-Barton, 1995, pp. 307 - 309, p. 335).

Leonard credits Chris Argyris of MIT, fellow Harvard academic David Garvin (discussed below), and Steven Wheelwright, then Senior Assistant Dean and Edsel Bryant Ford Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, also a founder of Integral Inc - a consultancy firm with “the goal of transforming academia’s latest research in innovation strategy into useful and practical tools for managing innovation” (*Integral Inc. Founders*, n.d.) - for commenting on drafts of “The Factory as a Learning Laboratory”. Argyris and Argyris and Schön are included in the bibliography of that case study, as are Peter Senge, James March and Gareth Morgan (Distinguished Research Professor, Schulich School of Business, York University, Toronto) (Leonard-Barton, 1992, pp. 37 - 39).

Leonard does not explicitly identify herself as a learning organization theorist. Instead, she has coined the term *learning laboratories* to describe “complex organizational ecosystems that integrate problem solving, internal knowledge, innovation and experimentation, and external information.” (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 23). In the first paragraph of “The Factory as a Learning Laboratory” she quotes the CEO of Chaparral: “‘One of our core competencies,’ explained Gordon Forward, ‘is the rapid realization of new technology into products. We are a learning organization.’” (p. 23). In *Wellsprings of Knowledge* (1995) she asks, “What does an organization managed by and for the growth

of knowledge look like? How do managers think and behave in a learning organization? What activities create the knowledge assets?” (p. 5).

The phrase *learning organization* may be associated with other Boston-based academics, but her systems-based approach to practice-grounded learning, her underlying concerns with learning, knowledge and competitive advantage are similar to other learning organization theorists. However, Leonard’s focus on technological innovation is distinctive and her interest in the temporary, as evidenced in the Chaparral project, is unique.

It is important to note, though, that temporary projects are not the same thing as temporary organizations (as defined in this study). Projects are usually rooted within the framework (and resource base) of continuing organizations. Most people involved in project realisation are employed by a parent organization and on loan to a temporary sub-unit - the project team - for the duration of the project. Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson and Anders Söderholm (2002) define projects both in terms of time and task and more broadly:

In each example we can envisage the task demanding a certain organization – an organization that is no longer required and is ideally dismantled when the tasks are accomplished. The project is, in other words, a temporary organization (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). It is not always the case, however, that a task forms the foundation of the project.... For example, a construction project usually involves various groups of experts such as architects, engineering consultants, real estate firms, construction companies, and politically appointed decision makers from several organizations. Sometimes this whole team and their activities and resources are described as the project, but each of the organizations involved also treats its team and the resources it allocates to this endeavor as a separate project.... Project organizing is a perspective that is developed relative to certain activities, processes, and tasks. (p. 15)

It is obvious that Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm think of projects as taking place either within firms or, where they take place outside of firms, as resourced by contributions of human resources and other assets from a range of firms. One way or another, projects are contained within or resourced by enduring organizations. Chapters three, four, five and six of this study examine temporary organizations such as film units, where enduring organizations are almost unknown, except as firms which service the entire production sector, film labs for example. Film units are more extreme and more temporary than the projects Sahlin-Andersson, Söderholm and Leonard are familiar with. Nevertheless, projects are undertakings that are temporary by design, and Leonard comes closer than any other theorist or group of theorists examined in this chapter to describing organizational design and organizational behaviour issues relevant to UK film units.

The outstanding feature of "The Factory as a Learning Laboratory" (1992) is Leonard's detailed description of Chaparral's near net-shape project and the ways in which it expresses the organization's overall knowledge creation and control activities. The case study impressively illustrates her theoretical points.

By 1990, Chaparral, founded on a Texan greenfield site in 1975, was outperforming competitors from the USA, Japan and Germany in terms of worker-hours per rolled ton of steel. The tenth largest USA steel producer, the company was "the largest supplier of steel rod for the oil industry and the largest supplier of rod for mobile home frames in the United States." (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 24).

The near net-shape project produced large structural steel beams at the same cost per pound as simple reinforcing bars. Meeting this cost objective, half that of larger mills, required that energy costs be reduced by 25%. Known processes for producing the technical results required were too capital and labour intensive. In order to solve this problem, the company had to develop "molds and processes...embody[ing] knowledge beyond anything available on the market and, in fact, beyond anything the leading vendors of steel-making molds thought possible" (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 26).

Leonard defines a learning laboratory like this:

A learning laboratory is an organization dedicated to knowledge creation, collection and control. Contribution to knowledge is a key criterion for all activities, albeit not the only one. In a learning laboratory, tremendous amounts of knowledge and skill are embedded in physical equipment and processes and embodied in people. More important, however, are the non-technical aspects, the managerial practices and underlying values that constantly renew and support the knowledge bases. (1992, p. 23)

She describes Chaparral as “an example of a highly successful learning laboratory: its leadership has put tremendous effort into creating a consistent learning system” and draws parallels with best-practice Japanese manufacturers, while suggesting that Chaparral’s managerial approach could usefully be transferred to other (non-manufacturing) sectors, such as service organizations (pp. 23 - 24).

A learning laboratory is an organic whole: “close scrutiny is required to appreciate its delicacy. To complicate matters, such a corporate ecosystem is in continuous flux, constantly regenerating itself. Even if a competitor identifies important elements of the system, emulation will require time. By then, Chaparral managers trust that they will have moved on to the next innovation.” (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 24). As Chaparral’s Chief Executive remarked, “[we can show competitors almost] *everything* and will be giving away *nothing* because they can’t take it home with them” (Leonard-Barton, p. 24). Like Senge, Leonard believes that systems thinking lies at the heart of the learning process.

“The Chaparral system has evolved in response to a turbulent competitive environment” (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 24). It was designed, created and maintained through the application of a holistic systems approach which permeated the whole organization (Leonard-Barton, pp. 24 - 25). This explains why:

When a fragment of the learning laboratory is pulled out to be examined (a particular project, a specific learning activity), it comes out vinelike, trailing roots

back to deeply held values and widely observed management practices. It is this intense interconnectedness that makes such systems difficult to imitate and fragile - but effective.² (Leonard-Barton, p. 25)

My own research suggests that although film unit activities and projects do connect to underlying values and management practices, these are likely to be as much the values and practices of the sector and of freelance individuals as of the unit. It is actually this alternative version of "intense interconnectedness" (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 25) that makes it possible to pull effective temporary units together at such short notice. One unit is not an imitation of another. Rather, every new unit builds on the experiences, knowledge and shared understandings of its contract workers, which they bring forward from previous units. Instead of units being difficult to assemble or fragile, these temporary organizations are robust and relatively easy to assemble.

Leonard identifies four "distinguishing activities" that define learning laboratories: "(1) problem solving (in current operations); (2) internal knowledge integration (across functions and projects); (3) innovation and experimentation (to build for the future); and (4) integration of external information flows" (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 25). Together, these four key activities create the "knowledge assets of the firm" (p. 25).

Like Senge (1990), Leonard associates each activity with an underlying value and a management system that includes rewards, with each element supporting the other three.

Subsystem one, owning the problem and solving it, consists of continuous independent problem solving to improve existing processes; egalitarianism as the underlying value; and shared rewards for reinforcement. Learning is the responsibility of empowered individuals who can solve problems independently because they have a clear sense of operating objectives. Since Chaparral intends producing inexpensive, excellent steel which has been manufactured in a safe way:

Progress has to be everyone's business - not just that of a few specialists.... For instance, two months after the first run of the near net-shape casting, the pulpit controls operator is carefully checking the timing on the line with a stopwatch. The red-hot beams pass through the rolling mill stand once, then stop, reverse, and go through again. Meanwhile, the flow of steel behind the beam being rolled is diverted. Every second of unnecessary diversion costs money because the diverted steel will have to be reheated to be rolled. Therefore the operator wants to achieve split-second timing. Asked who suggested he perform this function (which is often given to a process engineer elsewhere), he is surprised at the question: 'No one.' He considers it obvious that improvement is always a part of his job.... One of the greatest advantages of this attitude, as a maintenance foreman points out, is that 'ideas come from just about everybody. The operators working on the equipment have a lot of input because they see the exact problems when they happen.'.... 'We are all out here to make it run. Probably 90 percent of the problems never even make it to the morning meetings.... They are fixed in the field.' (Leonard-Barton, 1992, pp. 26 - 27)

In chapter five, Ed makes an identical comment about most film unit problems being solved on the floor as they arise.

The negative aspect of this "intrapreneurial" attitude (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 27) is that although goals are set, "no one has authority to tell another employee *how* to accomplish a task. Process engineers and supervisors who know a better procedure often have difficulties convincing operators on the line - much less their peers." (Leonard-Barton, p. 27).

The values associated with subsystem one, egalitarianism and respect for the individual, are based on the belief that:

All individuals have potential to contribute to the joint enterprise (if they are willing to develop competence). Forward has observed, 'We figured that if we

could tap the egos of everyone in the company, we could move mountains.'

There are no assigned parking places, no different colored hard hats or uniforms reflecting title or position.... However, respect for the individual does not mean equality of responsibility, lack of discipline, or even consensual decision making. Chaparral managers believe that a supervisor should be a leader, trained to make good decisions - including hiring and firing. (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 27)

The managerial system supporting subsystem one is to do with individual rewards. Chaparral workers are salaried (as opposed to the industry standard, hourly-paid). There are no time clocks. There is paid sick leave. Everyone in the company rotates through night shifts. Bonus schemes are linked to company profits:

93% of the employees are stockholders and together own 3% of the stock.... A furnace controls operator comments, 'I feel like this company partly belongs to me. Owning part of the company makes you care. I take better care not to waste anything because I feel like I am paying for it.' (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 28)

Leonard's second subsystem concerns the acquisition of knowledge: "Every day, in every project, add to the knowledge resources" (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 28). She suggests that:

In a learning laboratory, one would expect to see visible embodiment of knowledge creation and control in highly innovative physical systems.... Because of the constant push to improve production, Chaparral managers have to design what they need, rather than purchase the best available equipment off-the-shelf. Why design in-house? 'To keep the knowledge here,' a mill manager explains. Moreover, managers assume that the performance of *any* purchased equipment can be improved. Some improvements are noted enough to be patented. (Leonard-Barton, p. 28)

The physical production processes at Chaparral are knowledge intensive:

Chaparral management emphasizes homogenizing the level of knowledge throughout; few pockets of information are isolated by position, function or

working shift. Information flow at Chaparral is obviously aided by its size; deliberately held to under a thousand employees.... Hierarchical boundaries are minimal.... No research and development (R & D) department exists separate from production. Forward maintains that 'everybody is in research and development. The plant is our laboratory.'... Employees at all levels are constantly tapping into the latest, most current knowledge banks around the world. (Leonard-Barton, pp. 29 - 30)

Subsystem two's value is shared knowledge, where success as a company "takes precedence over individual ownership of ideas" (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 30). The focus of concern is corporate achievement, rather than individuals seeking personal credit for new ideas. By contrast, in film units there is no interest in pooling information. There are sites or loci of shared or common knowledge, but specialist, expert knowledge tends to be made available on a need-to-know basis. Each department in a unit is expected to make decisions about its own area of expertise. Even the production office, which manages the temporary organization, defers to expert departmental knowledge, and this is discussed in chapter five.

Education is at the heart of subsystem two (Leonard-Barton, 1992). The company runs a formal apprenticeship program which takes three and a half years to complete, consisting of on-the-job training and theory-based learning. Operators may receive accreditation for prior learning. The teachers on this programme are hand-picked factory foremen. The company also sends employees to specialist external courses and conferences.

Subsystem three, challenging the status quo, involves pushing knowledge boundaries. The principle is, "always reach beyond your grasp" (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 31). The company recruits new employees and suppliers who think of risk in a positive way and who are interested in challenging their own and others' thinking.

The activity underpinning subsystem three is continuous experimentation:

Learning requires constant pushing beyond the known, and Chaparral employees are skilled experimenters.... The operating rule is this: if you have an idea, try it.... 'In other companies the word is - don't rock the boat. Here we rock the hell out of the boat. We don't know the factory's limits. We want it to change, to evolve.' (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 31)

Subsystem three's value is positive risk:

Managers of a learning factory must tolerate, even welcome, a certain amount of risk as a concomitant of knowledge acquisition.... Says Forward, 'We look at risk differently from other people. We always ask what is the risk of doing *nothing*. We don't bet the company, but if we're not taking some calculated risks, if we stop growing, we may die.'... [a foreman says] 'You don't have to cover up a mistake here. You just fix it and keep on going.' (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 32)

The managerial systems for subsystem three are hiring practices:

The most important managerial system in a learning laboratory is selecting and retaining the right employees... Although top managers and a few specialized 'gurus' at Chaparral have extensive steel experience, when Chaparral was first set up, management decided not to look for workers with industry experience.... Highly selective hiring procedures continue to reflect concern that new employees fit into the Chaparral culture. (Leonard-Barton, 1992, pp. 32 - 33)

and career pathways:

A strong aid in motivating continuous innovation is a clear path for advancement, not just in salary but in position.... Chaparral managers believe that skilled, innovative people will leave an organization if they see no prospect for personal growth. (Leonard-Barton, p. 33)

Crosstraining is linked to the idea of career development:

The company invests in crosstraining at a number of levels.... Recently the production managers for three mills were given the title of general manager and asked to learn each other's jobs and to cover for each other. This crosstraining is

intended to prepare them for general management of an entire operation, when Chaparral starts up another site.¹⁹ (Leonard-Barton, p. 33)

My fieldwork indicates that recruitment practices are of vital importance in film units too. Participants agreed that hiring is the single most important managerial activity to take place in units. Career pathways are important too, but in a reverse way to what Leonard suggests, since in UK film production, temporary organizations leave freelances, rather than the other way around. In contrast to Chaparral values, crosstraining is despised in film production as contaminating of labour specialisation, as expertness is highly valued in film units. Individuals who perform cross-functional roles do so out of desperation and are only found on the lowest budget, scratch units. These themes are developed in chapters three and five.

The fourth and final subsystem is concerned with accessing knowledge which is up-to-date and of the highest quality through networking and alliances. The activity which underpins this is integrating external knowledge:

At Chaparral, employees constantly scan the world for technical expertise that others have already invested in....Chaparral also constantly benchmarks its capabilities, not just against immediate competitors but also against best-of-class companies, even those from totally different industries.... Information obtained externally is rapidly incorporated through development projects, flowing through the created network almost as readily as it does inside the walls of the learning laboratory, because in both cases people working directly in production transmit the knowledge. (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 34)

Leonard describes how external facilities become extensions of Chaparral:

The development and testing laboratories in the German and Mexican firms served as virtual extensions of the corporation, for they possessed special equipment and skills that complemented Chaparral's design capabilities. However, knowing such sources of expertise exist would be useless if the factory

were not able to tap them, to jointly create more knowledge, and then to absorb that knowledge into the production system. (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 34)

Temporary film units depend on freelances working directly in production to create and transmit knowledge from a variety of sources, many of them external to the unit. These practices are discussed in chapters three and five.

The company creates and maintains links with academic institutions:

Chaparral invests in unorthodox knowledge-gathering mechanisms, for instance, by cosponsoring a research conference with the Colorado School of Mining about a new alloy under investigation. Forward himself treks back regularly to his alma mater, MIT, to consult with university experts.²⁰ (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 34)

The value associated with the fourth subsystem is openness. In order to receive and integrate external knowledge, Chaparral values “openness to innovation, whatever its origin. Knowledge is valued not so much for the pedigree of its source but for its usefulness.” (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 35).

The managerial system is the provision of adequate resource to create and service alliances and networks:

The company invests heavily in employee travel (and regards the expenses as just that - investments), often sending a team, including foremen and technical staff as well as vice presidents and operators, to investigate a new technology or to benchmark against competitors. Newly acquired knowledge need not filter down through the ranks, because the people who absorbed it are the ones who will apply it..... ‘We send the people who can best tell us what’s going on - whoever they are.’ (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 35)

Chaparral also networks with suppliers, sometimes to develop “a capability that would be useful [to Chaparral] in the future” (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 35).

Film units also depend heavily on eclectic networks and contacts - the networks and contacts of the freelances they employ. Freelances are expected to develop and maintain their own networks. Having said that, once a unit is up and running, resourcing networks and alliances in order to solve specific problems is commonplace, and examples of this are given in chapter five.

Leonard concludes by identifying key attributes of Chaparral's learning system: it is totally integrated into the organization; the organization has been "designed around the creation and control of knowledge" (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 35); and finally, the four subsystems support one another. She suggests that Chaparral can function as a template for other organizations interested in becoming or developing a learning laboratory: it demonstrates what a learning laboratory is like, and it was created through a series of transparent processes and decisions. She says, "If the specifics are not transferable, the principles underlying the Chaparral vision are." (Leonard-Barton, p. 36).

Chaparral has continued to build on its success in the early 1990s. In 1999, seven years after the large beam mill was completed in Midlothian, the company opened a new greenfield structural mill in Petersburg, Virginia, Chaparral Steel-Virginia, which the company describes as "innovative with respect to its location in the eastern U.S., plant layout, and the combination of processes and technologies" (*Chaparral Steel*, n.d.). In 2002, Chaparral Steel (a wholly owned subsidiary of TXI, Texas Industries Incorporated) is still performing well. Texas Industries Inc.'s *Quarterly Report* (SEC form 10Q) comparing financial information for three-month and nine-month periods ending in February 2002 with the same periods in 2001 confirmed that "steel sales for the quarter were up \$27.7 million from the prior year period on 20% higher shipments and 3% higher realized prices" (*TEXAS INDUSTRIES INC - Quarterly Report (SEC form 10Q)*, 2002). Following a terrorist attack on New York City's World Trade Centre in 2001, which had a significant negative impact on the USA economy, Chaparral continues to thrive and to innovate.

Leonard acknowledges that certain special circumstances may have advantaged Chaparral: its greenfield start as an organization designed to learn, and its compact nature (less than 1,000 employees), for example. She raises key questions:

For other companies interested in creating factories as learning laboratories, the questions are: Can it be done in a plant within a large corporation, where many of the managerial systems have already been set corporatewide and therefore are not at the plant manager's discretion? Can an existing plant be transformed when plant managers may not have the luxury of selecting people as freely as Chaparral did? Can a company less geographically isolated hope to reap returns on investing in its employees' intellectual advancement, or will they be lured away by other companies? (Leonard-Barton, 1992, pp. 35 - 36)

and suggests that "the precise process for implementing these principles will differ markedly from company to company.... If a learning capability is to be developed, the whole system must eventually be addressed." (Leonard-Barton, p. 36).

2.3.1 COMMENT

Although Leonard has written impressively about a temporary project at Chaparral, her motivation is to demonstrate how such projects can contribute to the long-term success of the host organization. For Leonard, temporary projects are capability-building exercises, not ends in themselves. Her particular focus is on technological innovation and organizational longevity. Her research has targeted:

...organizations that compete on the basis of technological advantage (rather than, say, personal services, access to natural resources, artistic talent, or distribution rights). These strategic technological capabilities are organic systems of interdependent dimensions that are created over time and can be sustained over time. They are not easily imitated, transferred, or redirected on short notice. (Leonard-Barton, 1995, p. xi)

Her interest in organizational endurance is a deep theme to which she returns frequently. The key question for her is how firms develop their capabilities over time (Leonard-Barton, 1995).

2.4 DAVID A. GARVIN'S MODEL

New knowledge need not materialize by magic, nor through sweeping metaphors or grand themes. The roots of learning organizations lie in the gritty realities of practice. (Garvin, 2000, p. 17)

David Garvin is the Robert and Jane Cizik Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School.

Professor Garvin is highly research active. His interests include general management and change management. He is the author or co-author of nine books, including *Managing Quality* (1988), and is a guru of quality as part of manufacturing management and the author of various influential *Harvard Business Review* articles including, with Robert H. Hayes, the classic critique of USA under-investment in manufacturing, "Managing as if Tomorrow Mattered" (1982). He has published more than one hundred cases, teaching notes, supplements, exercises, and case videos as course materials for Harvard Business School. His training materials include a 1996 Harvard Business School video series entitled *Putting the Learning Organization to Work*. Garvin won the McKinsey award, presented annually for the best article in the *Harvard Business Review*, on three occasions. He was also awarded the Beckhard Prize, given annually for the best article on change and organizational development in the *Sloan Management Review*.

Garvin has "taught in executive education programs and consulted for over forty companies, including Boeing, Booz-Allen & Hamilton, BP, Frito-Lay, Gillette, L. L. Bean, 3M, Morgan Stanley, Motorola, Novartis, and Time Life" (*Faculty: David Garvin* (2001), 2002).

Garvin puts forward his ideas about learning organizations in “Building a Learning Organization” (*Harvard Business Review*, 1993), and in a subsequent book, *Learning in Action* (2000), which develops ideas showcased in the earlier article.

In the 1993 article, Garvin defines Honda, Corning and General Electric as learning organizations and mentions other large, private sector companies such as IBM, BP, Xerox, and Motorola. The list of references includes Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline* (1990). Ikujiro Nonaka, Robert Howard, and Modesto Maidique and Billie Jo Zirger are also cited, all of whom were also referred to by Leonard. Although Chaparral and Gordon Forward are mentioned, Leonard (1992) is not cited until *Learning in Action* (2000).

Garvin (1993) criticises other academics writing about learning organizations:

The recommendations are far too abstract, and too many questions remain unanswered. How, for example, will managers know when their companies have become learning organizations? What concrete changes in behaviour are required? What policies and programs must be put in place? How do you get from here to there? Most discussions of learning organizations finesse these issues.... Three issues are left unresolved; yet each is essential for effective implementation. First is the question of *meaning*. We need a plausible, well-grounded definition of learning organizations; it must be actionable and easy to apply. Second is the question of *management*. We need clearer guidelines for practice, filled with operational advice rather than high aspirations. And third is the question of *measurement*. We need better tools for assessing an organization’s rate and level of learning to ensure that gains have in fact been made. (p. 79)

However, he recognises the continuing power of the concept: “It is hard to find a manager today who does not give at least lip service to the importance of building a learning organization.” (Garvin, 2000, p. ix).

Having considered various definitions of organizational learning, Garvin (1993) offers this one, which requires “translating new knowledge into new ways of behaving.” (p.81):

A learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights. (p. 80)

By 2000, he had refined it:

A learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, interpreting, transferring, and retaining knowledge, and at purposefully modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights. (Garvin, p. 11)

Garvin (2000, pp. 13 - 15) suggests that organizations can determine whether or not they are learning organizations by considering the following questions:

1. *Does the organization have a defined learning agenda?*
2. *Is the organization open to discordant information?*
3. *Does the organization avoid repeated mistakes?*
4. *Does the organization lose critical knowledge when key people leave?*
5. *Does the organization act on what it knows?*

Since the fieldwork for this study was conducted in temporary organizations, Garvin’s fourth point is interesting to consider in respect of film units, where the appropriate questions are rather:

- Where does the learning go when a temporary organization disbands?
- How do temporary organizations integrate appropriate knowledge when a workforce totally composed of freelances is recruited?

These issues are addressed in chapters five and six.

For Garvin (2000), learning is staged, the three stages being the acquisition of information, the interpretation of information, and the application of information (pp. 20 - 21).

Five building blocks, each with a distinctive mind-set, tool kit and pattern of behaviour, create Garvin's model of the learning organization:

- Systematic problem solving;
- Experimentation;
- Learning from direct experience;
- Learning from others;
- Quick and efficient knowledge transfer systems.

Creating a learning organization means "creating systems and processes that support these activities and integrate them into the fabric of daily operations" (Garvin, 1993, p. 81).

For example, problem solving must rely on scientific method for problem definition and must use hard data for decision making, drawing on statistical tools to organise information:

Employees must therefore become more disciplined in their thinking and more attentive to details.... They must push beyond obvious symptoms to assess underlying causes, often collecting evidence when conventional wisdom says it is unnecessary. (Garvin, 1993, pp. 81 - 82)

Experimentation is an approach to identifying and testing new knowledge. "Using the scientific method is essential, and there are obvious parallels to systematic problem solving." (Garvin, 1993, p. 82) The distinction Garvin draws between problem solving and experimentation is that problem solving relates to current difficulties, while experimentation is linked to new horizons. He describes two kinds of experimentation. Programs of ongoing small experiments are:

...the mainstay of most continuous improvement programs and are especially common on the shop floor.... Successful ongoing programs share several characteristics. First, they work hard to ensure a steady flow of new ideas, even if they must be imported from outside the organization.... Ongoing programs also require an incentive system that favors risk taking.... Ongoing programs need

managers and employees who are trained in the skills required to perform and evaluate experiments. (Garvin, pp. 82 - 83)

Demonstration projects are larger and more complex, usually directed towards developing new organizational capabilities. “They are usually designed from scratch using a ‘clean slate’ approach” (Garvin, 1993, p. 83) and share distinctive characteristics:

- They involve trials of principles and approaches which the organization hopes to use elsewhere, and involve learning by doing;
- They are precedent-setters, establishing policies and procedures for subsequent projects;
- Employees will push boundaries to see if the rules really have changed;
- Teams are strongly multi-functional, reporting directly to senior management;
- Demonstration projects have only limited impact on the wider organization unless there is an explicit strategy for transferring learning.

Experimentation is valuable because experiments can generate theory: “knowing why is more fundamental: it captures underlying cause-and-effect relationships and accommodates exceptions, adaptations and unforeseen events.” (Garvin, 1993, pp. 84 - 85).

The line between problem solving and experimentation is not always so clear-cut in film production. In chapter five, problem solving is discussed in detail, and there is an interesting example of covert experimentation when Ed (1997) explains how he and a colleague used the opportunity of working together on a unit to refine their own managerial systems.

By failing to reflect on the past, managers allow valuable knowledge to escape. Garvin (1993, p. 85) quotes philosopher George Santayana’s maxim:

‘Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.’

Garvin recommends a diet of self analysis: a systematic review of past failures and successes in order to record and circulate learning points. He points out that learning from failure can be invaluable. He discusses case-study-based reflective systems that companies such as Boeing and BP have put in place to capture post-project learning.

2.4.1 COMMENT

For Garvin, learning from others is similar to benchmarking, a disciplined process which starts by identifying best practice organizations and “continues with careful study of one’s own practices and performance, progresses through systematic site visits and interviews, and concludes with an analysis of results, development of recommendations, and implementation.” (Garvin, 1993, p. 86). Customers provide another useful source of ideas, although tapping their tacit knowledge can pose challenges. He mentions Xerox, which uses a team of anthropologists to study users of new products, and Digital, which has designed an interactive process for its software engineers to employ for the observation of new technology users (Garvin, p. 86). Learning from others requires an open mind and the dropping of defensive attitudes.

To transfer knowledge is to share the products of learning throughout the organization:

For learning to be more than a local affair, knowledge must spread quickly and efficiently throughout the organization.... A variety of mechanisms spur this process, including written, oral and visual reports, site visits and tours, personnel rotation programs, education and training programs, and standardization programs. (Garvin, 1993, p. 87)

“If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.” (Garvin, 1993, p. 89). Garvin discusses various output-based measurements of performance, but rejects these as too narrow. He prefers Ray Stata’s half-life curve. Developed by Analog Devices, it measures the time it takes to achieve a 50% improvement in a given performance measurement (Garvin, pp. 89 – 90). Companies, divisions or departments that take less time to improve must be

learning faster than their competitors. This approach is flexible, and can be applied to any output measure, not just costs or prices. It is easy to put in place, provides an easily understood measure and allows for comparisons between groups. Still, Garvin criticises half-life curves as being solely focused on results, and points out that some vital corporate initiatives are bound to be large-scale long-term projects with few short-term outcomes. In such situations, he suggests that surveys, questionnaires and interviews would be more valid methods of assessment.

Garvin suggests that creating an appropriate environment is important for learning, that learning requires a time commitment, and that it may require teaching or training inputs. He suggests that recognising and accepting differences, providing timely feedback, stimulating employees intellectually, and tolerating errors and mistakes all contribute to the facilitation of learning (Garvin, 2000, pp. 34 – 43). None of these factors are valued on UK film units (chapters three, four and five investigate these issues).

Garvin recommends opening organizational boundaries so that information can flow freely, and the creation of various learning events and forums (1993, p. 91). In film units, no one *waits* for organizational boundaries to be opened: operating across boundaries is a given, and this is explored in chapters three, four, five and six.

In the second chapter of *Learning in Action* (2000) Garvin (p. 27) refers to a concept which could be described as *unlearning*: “It is essential to eliminate unnecessary or outdated tasks at the same time that new ones are added... Most companies, unfortunately, only understand the concept of addition; they are much weaker when it comes to subtracting work.” Unlearning is implicitly considered in chapters three through six: as freelancers move from unit to unit they flex with the demands of the situations they find themselves in.

Like Senge and Leonard, Garvin is focused on long-term organizational improvement, and therefore invested in organizational longevity. He believes that in order for learning to take place, knowledge must be integrated into the organization:

New ideas must diffuse rapidly throughout the organization, extending from person to person, department to department, and division to division. Eventually, they must become embedded in organizational 'memory,' appearing as policies, procedures, and norms to ensure that they are retained over time. Purely local knowledge is valuable, but it does not mark the existence of an organization that has learned. (Garvin, 2000, p. 11)

Garvin's interest lies in operationalising learning organization theory: uncomfortable with ambiguity, he is keen to define terms and to get on with the business of converting existing businesses into more efficient and more effective learning organizations. Garvin writes about management from a quantitative perspective. He is an advocate of measuring change, although he recognises that purely quantitative measurements of output are not always either appropriate or adequate. He is committed to the scientific method, and interested in gradual, staged approaches to improving quality such as TQM and benchmarking. Transformation is not on his agenda. Garvin's writing suggests a depth of knowledge about manufacturing. Control is important to him: implicitly he interprets organizational change as something which is driven from the top.

2.5 MIKE PEDLER, JOHN BURGOYNE AND TOM BOYDELL'S MODEL

In the years that have passed since we first began thinking about it, the idea of the Learning Company has not diminished in its brilliance. Despite the efforts, it often seems no nearer in terms of realization, yet it continues to excite imaginations and encourage ambitions. (Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell, 1991, p. ix)

Mike Pedler, John Burgoyne and Tom Boydell have been working together since 1976, collaborating on books, conferences, study groups, consultancy work and teaching.

Initially the group focused on self-development issues. Then it became concerned with the notion of the *learning company* (Pedler et al., 1991, p. ix).

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John Burgoyne is Professor of Management Learning and Head of the Department of Management Learning, Lancaster University Management School. He is also Associate Editor, British Journal of Management. He has published extensively on management learning, the learning organization, and personal development. (*Staff Information: Professor John Burgoyne*, 2002)

Tom Boydell is a Visiting Faculty Member at the Euro-Arab Management School (EAMS), which is based in Granada, Spain (*Tom Boydell*, n.d.). He holds external teaching and research appointments at a number of universities. Formerly he was a Principal Lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, where he was responsible for postgraduate programmes in human resource management and organizational development and learning. With his partners Mike Pedler and John Burgoyne, he established the Learning Company Project, where he researches, writes and consults. He has written and co-authored over thirty books on management and organizational learning. He has worked with clients throughout Europe, North and South America and South Africa.

The authors outline their theory in a 1991 book, *The Learning Company: A Strategy for Sustainable Development*, which was written to enable readers to move their organizations towards becoming learning companies. The group credits Geoffrey Holland, then Director of the Manpower Services Commission, with coining the phrase

learning company in a 1986 speech made in London, “calling for a new management development initiative in the UK” (Pedler et al., 1991, p. ix):

‘If we are to survive - individually or as companies, or as a country - we must create a tradition of ‘learning companies’. Every company must be a ‘learning company’.’ (Pedler et al., p. ix)

“We made the term Learning Company an idea into which we began to put our individual and collective energies.” (Pedler et al., 1991, p. ix). By May 1988 the group had produced a report for the Training Agency titled *Towards the Learning Company* (Pedler et al., p. 190). In a pre-publication draft of this report, they refer to the learning company as “the spirit of the times,” expressive of the zeitgeist (Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell, 1988a, p. 6).

The group prefer *learning company* as a phrase rather than alternatives such as *learning organization* because it considers the term less mechanical and intimidating, also because “‘Company’...is one of our oldest words for a group of people engaged in a joint enterprise...we use the word ‘company’ for any collective endeavour and not to identify or give preference to a particular legal form or ownership pattern.” (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 1). The group define the phrase in this way: “A Learning Company is an organization that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself” (Pedler et al., p. 1). The term *members* refers to “employees, owners, customers, suppliers, neighbours, the environment and even competitors in some cases.” (Pedler et al., p. 1).

In discussing the pedigree of the learning company, the authors cite Bateson, Gardner, Lippitt, Schön, Revans, Argyris and Schön, Peters and Waterman, Garratt, Attwood and Beer, and Holly and Southworth, giving particular credit to socio-technical systems thinking for enabling them to conceptualise organizations as organisms with the ability to learn (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 2).

Companies which Pedler et al. (1991) mention by name include:

Royal Dutch Shell	Thorn EMI
IBM	Harvest Bakeries
Express Foods	Beethan Paper Mill
NHS	Billiton
Totley Kitchen Designs	Woodmill School
BBC	Wisewood School
Rover	Marks and Spencer
Pilkingtons	Motorola
Yorkshire Health	Mercian Windows
Crystal Computing	Loxley Travel
Keatings	Esprit de Corps
Border Dairies	Building Designs Systems
Sock Shop	Richardsons
Lasertek	Semco
G & C Fans	

Although it is not stated, it seems that these are organizations with which at least one of the three authors had direct contact, as a consultant, trainer, researcher or facilitator. The list represents a broad selection of organizations, mainly, but not exclusively, private sector.

The group applies three framing devices in order to consider “what companies are like, why they are the way they are and what is involved in their change and evolution” (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 3). These are: the driving idea behind the organization (its vision); the life stage of the organization (for example, new or mature); and the era of the organization, which relates to macroeconomic phases such as pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial and to locally predominant types of economic activity, i.e. primary, secondary and so forth (Pedler et al., p. 3). Temporary organizations like film units do have distinct life stages, which are described in chapter three, but very different criteria apply.

They also put forward the notion of an eternal process whereby an organizational problem (P1) is solved with a solution (S1) - a new idea. However, the seeds of its own destruction lie dormant within each solution, whereby it becomes “distorted, polluted or simply over-the-top, too much of a good thing.” (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 11). At this point, S1 becomes a new problem, P2, requiring a new solution, S2, to address it, and so on (Pedler et al., pp. 10 - 15).

The group suggests eleven dimensions of a learning company:

1. A learning approach to strategy
2. Participative policy making
3. Informating (using information technology to inform and empower)
4. Formative accounting and control systems
5. Internal exchange (an internal marketplace)
6. Reward flexibility
7. Enabling structures
8. Boundary workers as environmental scanners
9. Inter-company learning
10. Learning climate
11. Self-development opportunities for all

Strategy and policy making are grouped together as *strategy*; informating, control systems and the internal market place form *looking in*; *enabling structures* stands alone; environmental scanning and inter-company learning are *looking out*; and finally the learning climate and self-development form *learning opportunities*. The authors suggest that organizations can map themselves by considering how they match these characteristics. They also propose a double-loop model which links individual and organizational learning and action (Pedler et al., 1991, pp. 28 - 33).

The authors point out that “companies differ from people in one respect. There is no more or less fixed life span.” (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 34), and further,

Seen as organisms, companies are dynamic. Every year many thousands are brought to life by hopeful people and every year many also die through bankruptcy, takeover or simply ceasing trading. Infant mortality of companies is very high - 40 or 50 per cent is not unusual in the first year. (Pedler et al., pp. 34 – 35)

They discuss company life cycles, from birth to death, noting that “in the Learning Company we know that developing from one stage to another is not easy, that crisis and conflict cannot be avoided in the move from the old to the new.” (Pedler et al., pp 34 - 35).

Although this is an acknowledgement that organizations can be short-lived, the inference is that briefness or temporariness is not intentional, by design, but instead represents an organizational life cut short by bad luck or incompetence. Using the phrase *infant mortality* to describe those organizations which cease trading within twelve months suggests that temporariness is a tragedy.

In their 1988 report, the authors refer to their interest in creating organizations which are, “opportunity structures enabling people to develop and grow whilst ensuring ‘Hard Systems’ implementation - building disciplinary, appraisal and above all perhaps, budgetary and payment systems that reflect Learning Company values” (Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell, p. 9) and note that it will be necessary “to tolerate much higher level of constructive conflict - of fierce and open debate over differences which may lead to new possibilities for thought and action” (Pedler et al., p. 9).

Era spotting refers to environmental scanning, including the use of SWOT analysis, in order to identify important issues or trends likely to impact on the organization in the future. The group characterises the present era as post-modern, “the post-industrial service age.... concerned with selling information, image and high-value products and services.” (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 44). The major trend it identifies is the global ecological crisis.

The principal part of the book consists of “101 Glimpses of the Learning Company.... Each Glimpse stands alone, making its own point and this chapter is best thought of as a collection of short stories.” (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 52). The Glimpses are referenced under the eleven characteristics mentioned above and also under an additional heading, *Overview* (Pedler et al, p. 53). The chapter consists of mini case studies, groupwork exercises, material drawn from consultancy work, discussion of theory (for example, Ackoff’s circular organization), quizzes and so forth (Pedler et al., pp. 54 - 209).

The group considers that the concept of the learning company emerged from late twentieth century notions concerning organizations, training, development, and quality management; and as a response to significant numbers of organizations facing developmental crisis (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 16). It also links the emergence of the learning company idea to developing ideas about learning:

There seems to have been something of a progression in the focus of our concerns about learning in the late twentieth century. We started from the behaviourist and psychoanalytical concerns for learning in the individual. We have applied learning theories to groups and teams in companies. This book addresses the company as a focus for learning and development. This is new for us personally and perhaps it is new for us as a community of people concerned with improving our individual and collective abilities to manage and organize. Once we can begin to talk sensibly at this level and create data and experience that helps us work here, can the ‘*Learning Society*’ be far away? (Pedler et al., pp. 210 - 211)

Indeed, the authors consider that we must move towards a *learning world* in order to manage the implications of post-industrialism/post-modernism, the global ecological crisis, and a worldwide resurgence of spiritual values (Pedler et al., 1991, pp. 211 - 212).

5.1 COMMENT

In *The Learning Company* (1991), the group has produced a book which is in part a theoretical exploration of their learning company concept, and in part a manual for managers wishing to take practical steps to move their organizations towards learning company ideals. Suggested activities include developing a company biography, stakeholder mapping, vision building, and SWOT analysis. The format of the book is an expression of the authors' interest in and commitment to experiential learning and action learning. It has been designed for readers who wish to develop their organizations towards the authors' model themselves, rather than involving external consultants.

Although the choice of the term *company*, as opposed to *organization*, has significance for the authors, they seem to share common concerns about learning and managing change with the other theorists discussed in this chapter.

The group's interest in the learning company is, in part, a reaction against what have been perceived as significant failures of the British education and training system.

Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1991) believe that policy making must be participatory, because the diversity represented by employees, customers, suppliers, owners and neighbours "although complicated, is, in fact, valuable in that it leads to creativity, to better ideas and solutions" (p. 19).

The group shares a commitment to design with Garratt (1987), noting that "in modern jargon the Learning Company will be design-led, as befits an 'information age' in which ideas provide the engines of the new industrial order" (Pedler et al., 1988, p. 10). Organizations such as film units are designed to meet the requirements of particular scripts and financiers. They are also temporary by design.

The authors are deeply concerned with organizational longevity. They see organizations as existing to develop both themselves and the people within them over a substantial period of time. The notion of a temporary organization is outside their frame of reference.

At the heart of the *Learning Company* model lies a concern with corporate spirituality and ethics and, similar to Senge's model, commitment to a mystical concept of transformation.

2.6 ALAN JONES AND CHRIS HENDRY'S MODEL

There is no detailed research work completed which can confirm or deny, over time, whether such [learning organization] ideas and practices genuinely create fitter and better organizations for both the people who work in them and the society they seek to serve. (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, p. 58)

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Chris Hendry is Centenary Professor in Organisational Behaviour at City University Business School. He was previously Principal Research Fellow and Associate Director in the Centre for Corporate Strategy and Change at Warwick University (*Chris Hendry*, n.d.).

In 1992 Jones and Hendry produced a report, *The Learning Organization: A Review of Literature and Practice* (1992c), commissioned by The Human Resource Development (HRD) Partnership, a consortium of powerful organizations (including The British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education, The British Institute of

Management, The Employment Department, The Industrial Society, The Institute of Personnel Management, Information and Technologies for Development, The National Economic Development Office and The National Council of Industry Training Organizations) which “*exists to help organizations establish and sustain cultures which are supportive of both organizational and people development for their mutual benefit.*” (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, p. 62).

It followed on the heels of two Royal Society of Arts (RSA) reports on post-compulsory education and training by Sir Christopher Ball: *Learning Pays* (1991) and *Profitable Learning* (1992) (Jones & Hendry, 1992c). “Sir Christopher Ball is chancellor of Derby University and chairman of the Global University Alliance. He founded the national Campaign for Learning and chairs a new research group, The Talent Foundation.” (Ball, 2001, p. 1).

In 1992 Jones and Hendry also published *Learning Organization* (1992a) with the HRD Partnership and *The Learning Organisation* (1992b) with The Institute of Management. In 1994 Hendry and Jones published a research note in the British Journal of Management,

“The Learning Organization: Adult Learning and Organizational Transformation.”

Jones and Hendry (1992c) stated their intentions: “This report reviews the current concept of the learning organization as presented by a variety of writers and researchers, and also looks at examples of where attempts are being made to implement the concept.” (p. iii). Further, “The main focus of this report is on how organizations make themselves leaner, fitter, and able to compete by developing and transforming their people through the learning process. The result should be an organization which has the capacity to create a shared vision and purpose, and a meaningful work environment.” (p. iii). However, much of their *Review* was about organizational learning, which they acknowledge:

Sections of this report have highlighted the work of researchers on organizational learning, and how this has produced superior performance across a wide range of

organizational activities, including improved profit and production methods.
(Jones & Hendry, p. 56)

The *Review* attempted to determine:

(a) what a 'learning organization' is; (b) what a 'learning organization' looks like in theory and in practice; (c) how a 'learning organization' is created; (d) the benefits which accrue from adopting the concept; and (e) the implications of adopting a 'learning organization' model. (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, p. 1)

The definition of a learning organization which Jones and Hendry adopted for the purposes of their 1992 report was Pedler, Boydell and Burgoyne's (1991):

'A learning organization is one which facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself.' (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, p. iii)

Jones and Hendry (1992c) identify key learning organization themes across a range of authors as: *"transformation, change, participation, innovation, altering the way people work, adapting, management style, delegation, fostering employee involvement [sic]"* (p. 4). Two years later, Hendry and Jones (1994, p. 4) note that,

The literature does provide some model characteristics of the learning organization. They include organizations that are making themselves flatter. taking out levels of management, providing greater access to training (formal and informal) for the work force, introducing self-development programmes, and generally motivating personnel at all levels within the organization to create shared vision and leadership (Garratt, 1990; Lessem, 1990; Pedler et al, 1991; Smythe Dorward Lambert, 1991; Senge, 1992; Clark, 1992; Jones and Hendry, 1992).

The authors suggest that a successful learning organization is one that has aims beyond profit, generating "'wealth' for the wider social good" and comment that organizations which do not pursue a social agenda will "fall short of becoming a learning organization in its purest form." (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, p. v). They credit two groups of researchers

(Pedler, Boydell and Burgoyne from the UK, and Hayes, Wheelwright and Clark from the USA) with simultaneously developed the notion of the *learning organization* in 1988 (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, p. 3).

Jones and Hendry (1992c) prefer the term *organization* to *company*, believing the former to be more inclusive:

Many organizations in the public and private sectors exist primarily as service orientated activities - for example, local authorities, schools and hospitals. They are not essentially in the market to generate profits for shareholders, yet seek to address issues of major change linked to learning. Therefore, by using the term 'learning organization' this review seeks to evaluate and comment on any type of organization which purports to base its activities around learning. (p. 3)

They trace the learning organization concept to an idea which originated in the 1920s: that of the learning company - a commercial firm engaged in "change processes, particularly in relation to human resource management" (Jones & Hendry, p. 2).

According to Jones and Hendry this notion was developed in the 1960s and 1970s by authors such as Argyris and Schön (1978) and action learning ideas were introduced in the 80s by Hedberg (1981), Morgan (1983, 1986), Revans (1982), Pettigrew (1974 & 1985) and Pettigrew and Whipp (1991). Pedler, Boydell and Burgoyne are credited with developing the learning company concept: in particular their 1988 report for the Training Agency/The Department of Employment is mentioned (Jones & Hendry, p. 2). Jones and Hendry's report is, amongst other things, a response to issues raised by Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell. They also refer to the work of Senge, Garratt and Morgan.

Total Quality Management (TQM), with its emphasis on experiential learning in the workplace, was another influence on the development of learning organization theory, although for Jones and Hendry (1992c, p. 2) the pursuit of TQM is quite distinct from the process of becoming a learning organization.

The report lists a number of large, high-profile, self-identified learning organizations including Shell, Grand Metropolitan, Rover, Cadbury-Schweppes, Sun Alliance, Bradford

Metropolitan Council, and various health authorities (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, p. 2). The *Review* refers to organizations which, in the authors' view, have adopted learning organization ideas "without realising it" (Jones & Hendry, p. v) and points out that the "creation of a learning organization is not limited to any particular sector of industry" (p. 35). The *Review* offers cameos of learning organization development (Jones & Hendry, pp. 36 - 44). Jones and Hendry call for action-based research to report on how learning organizations are created and developed, and to examine whether or not learning organizations "really do make a difference and are clear leaders to be emulated" (p. vi).

Jones' and Hendry's (1992c) five stage model of learning development offers guidance for organizations wishing to become learning organizations, the five stages being foundation, formation, continuation, transformation and transfiguration. The *Review* invites organizations to measure their learning development and suggests what organizations are likely to be doing in each phase of development.

Jones and Hendry (1992c) identify the importance of tacit learning:

Hidden or institutionalized learning are those skills and knowledge which people acquire and develop in the course of actually doing their job. Although specific job descriptions and practices may be produced by an organization, in reality there is a hidden agenda of activity. People adapt what they do and how they do it, to accommodate their own level of comfort within the organization and, as importantly, they make these adaptations as the requirements for performing a particular job change because of market trends, changing customer requirements, and so forth. (p. 5)

Tacit knowledge is very important in film units too. Professor Alice Lam, in her paper "Tacit Knowledge, Organizational Learning and Societal Institutions: An Integrated Framework" (2000), has defined tacit knowledge as knowledge that is "manifested implicitly" (p. 21). She says,

Polanyi (1962) argues that a large part of human knowledge is tacit. This is particularly true of operational skills and know-how acquired through practical experience. Knowledge of this type is action-oriented and has a personal quality that makes it difficult to formalize or communicate. Unlike explicit knowledge which can be formulated, abstracted and transferred across time and space independently of the knowing subjects, the transfer of tacit knowledge requires close interaction and the build up of shared understanding and trust among them. (p. 19)

Lam explains that tacit knowledge is acquired differently than explicit knowledge:

Tacit knowledge...can only be acquired through practical experience in the relevant context, i.e. 'learning by doing'. Moreover, as Nonaka observed (1994: 21-22), the 'variety' of experience and the individual's involvement in the 'context' are critical factors determining its generation and accumulation. (p. 19)

She says that tacit knowledge is "personal and contextual. It is distributive, and cannot easily be aggregated. The realization of its full potential required the close involvement and cooperation of the knowing subject." (p. 19). Tacit knowledge is highly valued in film units, and crucial to their effective functioning. Lam labels individual tacit knowledge as *embodied knowledge* (p. 20) and says,

...embodied knowledge builds upon 'bodily' or practical experience....[it] is also context specific, it is 'particular knowledge' which becomes relevant in practice only 'in the light of the problem at hand' (Barley 1996). Its generation cannot be separated from application. (p. 20)

The collective form of tacit knowledge she calls *embedded knowledge*:

It is the Durkhemian type of tacit knowledge based on shared beliefs and understanding within an organization which makes effective communication possible. It is rooted in an organization's 'communities-of-practice', a concept used by Brown and Duguid (1991) to denote the socially constructed and interactive nature of learning. Embedded knowledge is relation-specific, contextual and dispersed. It is organic and dynamic: an emergent form of

knowledge capable of supporting complex patterns of interaction in the absence of written rules. (Lam, p. 21)

Tacit skills are vital in temporary organizations such as film units, where freelances are recruited for highly specific inputs peculiar to the realisation of each unique script. Unit members develop tacit skills and knowledge in the process of delivering tightly pre-specified outputs. Market trends and changing customer requirements can have a major impact on editing decisions, or require reshooting, but these are usually specialist matters for senior management, as they concern the marketing of texts, an economic aspect of the cultural industries explained in chapter three. Tacit knowledge in film units is not usually concerned with individuals flexing as their jobs change or bending their jobs to play to their strengths, although these scenarios are not impossible. Tacit knowledge is referred to in a variety of contexts in chapters three, five and six. It is significant for temporary organizations.

Like Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell, Jones and Hendry (1992c) suggest that the process of becoming a learning organization involves challenging values:

As old values and ways of doing things disappear, new activities challenge deep-rooted assumptions, and create what people will at first perceive as a disruptive tension. (pp. 5-6)

Jones and Hendry believe that:

Formal training and education, focusing on passive and systematic training over time, will have to give way to what Kenney and Reid (1988) describe as 'natural learning processes.' (p. 10)

Natural learning refers to "learning which results from doing a particular job, taking part in some form of work or out of work activity, interacting with fellow workers, and all the other formal and informal activities all human beings engage in." (Jones & Hendry, p. 10). This definition overlaps with the ideas of experiential learning "first conceived by Kolb, Rubin and McIntyre (1974)....[their] learning cycle model has been modified by a number of researchers including, Honey and Mumford (1996), and Revans (1980)... Concentrating on learning styles means focusing on how people learn how to learn."

(Jones & Hendry, p. 10). By 1994, Hendry and Jones were expressing interest in the notion of *soft learning*:

‘Soft learning’ contrasts with ‘hard learning’ - that is, learning which is pragmatic, formal and brought about through prescribed training. Soft learning is often unintended, indirect, not controlled by the organization and yet is at the heart of what the organization stands for while providing added value in adult learning. The paradox and dilemma for organizations is how to relax their control over the learning process while channelling the benefits from it.

The learning organization brings hard and soft learning together and in doing so creates stress and disruption (or what Senge (1992, p. 150) calls ‘creative tension’) for both individuals and the organization’s existing structures, status systems and values. (pp. 7 - 8)

Soft learning seems very similar to the authors’ 1992c notion of natural learning.

In discussing definitions of learning, Jones and Hendry (1992c) comment:

New work now stresses ‘experiential learning’, ‘self and group development’, and ‘collective organizational learning’ which results from flatter organizational structures. Where there is an emphasis on people actively being involved in their own learning and self-development, linked to the needs of their day to day work, then faster learning often occurs.... Learning which demonstrates links between one person’s activities and another’s has been shown to have a distinct advantage. (p. 9)

Natural learning, soft learning and experiential learning are the dominant ways of learning in film units, and they are linked to Lam’s ideas about tacit learning mentioned earlier. However, in units these active learning styles are not usually preceded by formal training and education. Approaches to learning in film units are discussed in chapters three, five and six.

Jones and Hendry (1992c) propose that just as individuals have preferred learning styles, organizations have preferred learning styles. These may or may not be compatible. To

complicate matters further, trainers have preferred training styles which may or may not match the preferences of organizational clients and/or individual trainees. Hence the current emphasis on developing and understanding theories behind the learning process and on self-directed learning (p. 11). The authors identify an important part of employee learning as “learning which equips them with the abilities to acquire new skills” (p. 11).

Although Jones and Hendry (1992c) identify the development of alternative communication patterns as vital to the success of learning organizations, they acknowledge that senior managers in an organization have been responsible for creating existing systems and structures. Even when these are dysfunctional, there can be strong commitment to maintaining them. This is expressed as conscious or unconscious resistance to change (p. 12). Jones and Hendry point out that “new ways of seeing and doing things cannot readily be accommodated by existing attitudes and practices.” (p. 13).

Using Senge’s term *metanoia*, meaning mind-shift, Jones and Hendry (1992c) call for a radical change in attitude and perception in order to create learning organizations which challenge “organizations not simply to do things differently but also to ‘think’ differently.” (p. 19). Jones and Hendry quote Ball to point out that while gradual change is likely to be acceptable to society, it will not meet change objectives, and, further, that radical change, which may be necessary, is not acceptable.

Becoming a learning organization is “as much about changing attitudes and perception as it is about learning skills, production techniques, or a new discipline.... The mind shift has to take place before the Pedler, Burgoyne, Boydell ‘transformation’ can occur.” (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, pp. 20 - 21).

Jones and Hendry extend the notion of three phases of individual learning put forward in *Learning Pays* to phases for organizational learning. The foundation phase for organizations, also referred to as the dependency stage, involves recreating enthusiasm for learning, ensuring that employees have basic skills and that they learn in ways that

expand their concept of work, including learning and working in groups and teams. This phase may require formal training so that employees at every level can acquire skills and knowledge they previously missed out on. “It is becoming increasingly clear that everyone in an organization needs to go through this part of the dependency learning cycle stage. In every sense, this may be the most crucial part of becoming a learning organization.” (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, p. 24).

The formation or transitional second phase emphasises team working in a variety of settings, and makes greater demands on individuals. Learning takes place in the context of the organization, and employees come to understand the nature of their own contribution as well as learning how others impact on the organization. Wishing to improve job performance and to take on new responsibilities, individuals begin to think ahead in terms of their own learning needs, and to identify the associated resource implications. Competency based qualifications and programmes such as *Investors in People* become relevant.

As chapters three, four, five and six will demonstrate, freelance individuals’ abilities to think ahead in the film production sector are highly developed. If they fail to pay adequate attention to their learning needs, freelancers risk becoming unemployable. Chapter five suggests how individuals set their own learning agendas, which focus on experiential learning and rarely involve formal qualifications.

During the final phase, continuation, individuals take responsibility for their own learning. The activities associated with this stage may include: formal learning; alternative working practices; shared responsibility for production goals; reduced levels of hierarchy, demarcation and status; job enlargement; job rotation; and the development of autonomous working groups (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, pp. 26 - 27).

Jones and Hendry (1992c) expand the RSA model by adding two further stages: transformation and transfiguration:

What is clear is that learning at this level or phase is not only about creating and sustaining levels of service or production. It is also about acquiring 'envisioning' skills. (p. 28)

This phase of learning focuses around *intangible assets*, using Pettigrew and Whipp's 1991 definition:

'Intangible assets include knowledge about markets and technologies and how to exploit them, as well as brands and reputation for quality of products, services and human resources. However, the most fundamental intangible assets, and those most linkable to competitive performance are organizational capabilities to learn and change.' (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, p. 28)

The transformation stage is characterised by changes in organizational structures and systems, experimentation with alternative work practices, commitment to equal opportunities in the workplace, a concern for ethical issues reflected in corporate responsibility to the wider community, management of personal change, an emphasis on creative leadership and entrepreneurship, concentration on intangible assets, flat management structures in which managers coach and facilitate, the abolition of blame culture and earmarking organizational time to think and reflect (Jones & Hendry, p. 29).

Film units' stock in trade are the kind of intangible assets such as embodied and embedded knowledge which have nothing to do with equal opportunities, corporate ethics, flat management structures, the abolition of blame culture or earmarked time for reflection. Units can only exist because of these potent intangible assets, including access to a wide variety of networks, and this is discussed in chapter five.

In terms of putting their 5-phase model into action, Jones and Hendry say:

There are no ideal types of organization and neither do organizations as a whole pass from one activity or phase to another. Indeed, one part of an organization may be far more advanced in its activities and thinking than another.... The value

of the 5-phase model presented here lies in the fact that it allows for a number of hypotheses to be highlighted. Specifically, it addresses (1) the issue as to whether organizations can develop in a progressional manner towards becoming learning organizations , and (2) whether or not an organization, which establishes itself as a learning organization from the very beginning, can transform and transfigure itself without all the trappings of traditional organizational structures and systems.... The learning organization concept raises the issue of how the ‘total view’ [of organizational learning] is organized and managed. (1992c, pp. 32 - 33)

The *Review* suggests that certain conditions *trigger* the creation of learning organizations:

The need to get greater participation from the work force, [the need to] produce better products/services in more efficient ways, the arrival of a new chairman who wants to change the culture of the organization, government intervention - for example, issuing of a people’s charter of rights and expectations, just the fact that things are not going right and need to be done differently, [and] when management experience a change or shift in their own perception about the value of people and what is done with them. (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, p. 48)

Jones and Hendry (1992c) note that where special vocabulary is used within change initiatives, for example the word *empower* or the phrase *corporate entrepreneurship* (p. 49), it is intended as an aid to creating communal concepts within the organization. “However, unless that vision is shared, and employees have a stake in it, the chances are it will not be achieved” (p. 49). They acknowledge that the organizational context for change is all-important, and that isolated activities promoting rapid change are likely to fail (p. 50).

For Jones and Hendry (1992c) the key factors in creating learning organizations are: “team learning, changing power structures, leading change, giving vision and expressing concern for social and ethical issues” (p. 50).

Jones and Hendry (1992c) believe that a shared understanding of purpose drives organizations:

Vision or purpose statements are seen in the Stanford research [Collins and Porras, 1991] as having no limit, but they must be realistic as well as visionary or idealistic, so that they are statements of what the organization really is like as distinct from what it 'should' be like. (p. 53)

In Jones' and Hendry's (1992c) view, the research on organizational learning that they reviewed in function of this report indicated that "over time, an organization has only one asset which grows in value - people" (p. 56). Therefore, organizations have to develop employees, and this is complex:

Empowerment eventually raises crucial issues about power and its acquisition and operation, leadership, decision making, and the ownership of activities and their results.... It is these issues which lie at the heart of the learning organization. (Jones & Hendry, p. 56)

Chapters five and six consider professional development in film units.

Referring to *Learning Pays*, Jones and Hendry (1992c) note:

Organizations which focus on 'learning' and 'change' are thought to be more competitive and better able to produce sustained wealth and profit, not simply to further the development of the organization, but also to channel such wealth back into the community itself - examples include Grand Metropolitan, Cadbury-Schweppes and Rowntrees. (p. 56)

The authors link the successful development of knowledge with organizational form and performance: "Where an organization places more emphasis on intangible assets, and has a strategy of developing them over time, it becomes leaner, fitter, and more readily able to cope with change and the changing social contexts in which organizations have to exist." (p. 56).

Jones and Hendry 1992c wonder if the learning organization is "an ideal capable of reality" (p. 58):

Where a company chairman, for example, espouses flatter levels of management, or where the authors of a report suggest the abandonment of privilege, and highlight the need for the greater empowerment of people in society, are they themselves prepared to put their own suggestions and ideas into action by, say, relinquishing the accolades and prizes conferred on them by the very system they seek to criticise and change? (p. 59)

The Learning Organization: A Review of Literature and Practice closes with a series of recommendations to the Human Resource Development Partnership, calling for further research, specifically “longitudinal process research, say, over 18 - 24 months, which will provide hard evidence to replace much of what at present is simply anecdotal retrospective description. A further element for empirical research will be a project which is ‘action-oriented’ - that is, where the researcher acts as a catalyst to speed up and/or slow down the processes of change.” (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, p. 61). The authors highlight the following areas for investigation:

- the conditions for development and the interactive processes between elements of a learning organization which produce successful change;
- processes of change, including how such organizations are able to create the slack to provide time for reflection...;
- the outputs and effects of activities, not simply alone, but more especially in how they interconnect to produce a comprehensive transformation of the organization, and development of those in it, thus producing renewed glimpses of a transfigurational state. (Jones & Hendry, p. 61)

The authors’ *Research Note* (1994) concludes with a call for further investigation:

Research needs to reveal the interdependent contexts that encourage and produce learning and enable the organization to change and transform itself while creating a vision of an idealised state to which it should aim. (Jones & Hendry, p. 8)

2.6.1 COMMENT

Whether age, size of the company, industry sector, or stage of growth are relevant factors has yet to be determined. (Jones & Hendry, 1992c, p. iv)

Throughout their dense *Review* and their *Research Note*, which consider overlapping bodies of literature, the authors explore a wide variety of ideas about the learning organization and about organizational learning. Although Jones and Hendry suggest that they have suspended judgement about the characteristics of learning organizations, they support the importance of organizational longevity. Their writing demonstrates a persisting interest in how learning environments can be created within ongoing organizational settings.

Jones and Hendry consider how formal education and training systems have affected the UK workforce and offer their own 5-phase model which describes stages through which organizations transit as they move towards becoming a learning organization. The authors link the concept of learning organizations with flat, non-hierarchical organizational structures, the implication being that learning organizations demand such configurations. This notion, and other ideas they promote, such as stewardship of self, could be interpreted as using learning organization rhetoric to advocate harsh policies of structural change and employee control such as downsizing, outplacing and self-policing under the guise of empowerment.

However, a major theme of Jones' and Hendry's is that of the moral and ethical dimensions of employee empowerment, and the ways in which empowerment may lead to a fundamental questioning of organizational purpose and identity, and ultimately to concerns with social and political issues outside the organization.

They consider organizational learning as a feature to be subsumed within their model of the learning organization:

We need to hold onto the idea of the ‘learning organization’ as a ‘direction’ whilst ‘organizational learning’, which is an aspect of the ‘learning organization’, is seen as a descriptive or heuristic device to explain and quantify learning activities and events. (Jones & Hendry, 1994, p. 5)

Possibly the most important question the authors’ *Review* raises is that of how organizations can escape from self-imposed hegemony. Employees are invested in the prevailing view of the organization and the environment in which it functions. Each contributes daily to making the organization what it is. Most people find it difficult to see the world, their organization, and their place within it with fresh eyes, and to consider that their actions may be based on models, assumptions and ideas which are no longer relevant:

Organizations also tend to engage only in acceptable learning - that is, learning which supports the organization’s structure and how people should act within it. Much useful learning may negate this. (Jones & Hendry, 1994, p. 6)

Temporary organizations such as film units are placed rather differently. With brief lifespans and greenfield starts, self-imposed hegemony of the sort that concerns Jones and Hendry is not an issue. This is not to say that the industry as a whole does not have deeply embedded routines, beliefs and so forth. These are explored in chapters three, four, five and six.

2.7 BOB GARRATT’S MODEL

This book [*The Learning Organization*]...strives to develop the idea of successful organizations as primarily ‘learning systems.’ (Garratt, 1987, p. 16)

Bob Garratt is a Senior Associate, Judge Institute of Management Studies, University of Cambridge and a member of the Professional Development Committee of the Institute of Directors (*Mr Bob Garratt*, n.d.). An experienced international management consultant,

Garratt started his career in design. He specialises in board development work, and extensive experience with this client group has dominated his approach to the learning organization:

This book is derived from some twelve years worth of private conversation with directors and director-potential managers, and from being asked by companies to help them address the issue of how to develop their existing and new generations of directors and general managers. (Garratt, 1987, p. 11)

Garratt's clients have included: "General Electric Company, TSB Group, CASE Communications, the Plessey Company, Phicom, Ellerman Lines Ltd, The European Space Agency, the EEC Esprit Programme, ICI, Interdean, Medtronic Europe, Bank of America International, Swiss-Nigerian Chemical Company, Aluminium Bahrain, Hutchinson Whampoa, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, the Management Development Centre of Hong Kong...and the State Economic Commission in Beijing." (Garratt, 1987, pp. 11 - 12).

In 1985 Garratt edited *Managing Yourself*, written by Mike Pedler and Tom Boydell, one of a series of books he edited in co-operation with the Association of Teachers of Management. In 1987 he wrote *The Learning Organization and the Need for Directors who Think*. His intellectual influences include Revans, Ashby, Belbin, Handy and Kolb. *The Learning Organization* had academic input from Manchester Business School (Garratt, 1987, p. 12).

Garratt's principal interest lies in governance (the system by which organizations are directed, controlled and evaluated), and especially in the development of direction-givers, those people who serve on the main or subsidiary boards of organizations. His fundamental tenet is that members of the board - company directors - must learn continuously in order to provide appropriate direction so that their organizations can succeed in climates of rapid change. In his experience, this rarely happens because directors are not educated or trained for leadership: "They do not give direction, do not

monitor changes in the social, economic and political environments in which they exist, and so do not ensure the survival of their organizations by being able to adapt their organizations to the rate of change in those environments.” (Garratt, 1987, p. 15). Garratt considers the long-term survival of organizations to be of great importance for society, and for shareholders.

Because directors do not feel competent as leaders, they are over-involved in the hands-on running of the organization and are particularly liable to interfere in areas of their own technical competence, finance, say, or marketing: “The workforce and managers are frustrated at not being able to do their work properly because someone above them is trying to do it for them, and little attention is paid to external environmental changes by the directors ‘because we are too busy dealing with day-to-day matters to worry about the future.’” (Garratt, 1987, p. 16). Directors feel more comfortable and more capable dealing with the organizations at this level. However, “it is a formula for short-term organizational inefficiency and long-term organizational ineffectiveness. The internal and external development processes of the organization are blocked. The chances of medium to long-term survival are decreased dramatically.” (Garratt, p. 16)

Garratt considers that directors are not recruited for their ability to think broadly and holistically, but rather for their expertise as functional specialists. In his view this is a poor way to select for leadership qualities (Garratt, 1987, pp. 17 - 18). In addition, he points out that it is imperative for top teams to work collaboratively to provide a “thinking function at the top of the business” (Garratt, p. 27). He quotes Reg Revans in highlighting the need for directors to cut through obfuscation: “We have to have experts to find answers to the difficult questions, but what I am interested in is who is going to ask the right bloody questions?” (Garratt, p. 34). Personal loyalties to particular constituencies within organizations (i.e. departmental loyalties) maximise conflict and prevent learning at board level (Garratt, p. 19). For Garratt, effective direction-givers are characterised by the ability to function effectively across discipline boundaries, and to enjoy and capitalise on “uncertainty and ambiguity”(Garratt, p. 20):

Not knowing the others' specialism can then be a positive advantage. Action learning is strong on the use of 'intelligent naivety' to open up intractable problems. Someone with intelligence, but no specialist knowledge, can and should ask fundamental, or discriminating, questions of the experts. (Garratt, p. 104)

Garratt's consultancy work has concerned converting *senior managers* - functional specialists - into *direction-givers* through a variety of interventions including the establishment of induction programmes for new directors, and teaching them how to delegate to the functional specialists who have replaced them (Garratt, 1987, p. 109). Stressing the importance of identifying time "to allow for the personal, professional and team development of directors" (Garratt, p. 117), he recommends three changes in thinking processes in order to move senior managers toward direction-giving:

1. Valuing differences and becoming comfortable with enjoying using them.
2. Learning to value the asking of discriminating questions of experts, rather than valuing depth of knowledge for its own sake.
3. Learning to value the skills and attitudes needed to set managerial questions in their broader economic, social and political contexts. (Garratt, p. 47)

Directors must "rise above the 'normal' control systems of the business and create ones which give a true overview of the performance within and outside the business." (Garratt, p. 117).

Garratt's background in design led him to link organizational learning and the concept of intellectual property rights (IPRs):

Western organizations are awash with learning about products and processes. However, the small amount of attention paid to codifying consciously and rigorously and to protecting that learning is causing concern, even in high-tech industries.... 'IPRs' have become of such importance that learning, specifically its codification and diffusion, has become a central concern of top management. (Garratt, 1987, p. 57)

Putting design at the centre of the organization has human resource implications: "If one believes that the only source of intellectual property development is learning, then the

only resource for learning in a competitive world is the workforce one employs.” (Garratt, p. 103). Garratt’s views are almost identical to those expressed by Jones and Hendry earlier in this chapter.

Garratt’s notion of the learning organization is hierarchical. “Defining hierarchical roles is necessary to create a learning organization.” (Garratt, 1987, p. 36). He has identified three levels within organizations: operational planning and actions (95% of employees work at this level); external monitoring (which may or may not take place in marketing and is rarely linked to organizational learning); and integrating and direction giving - the *brain* function of the organization which “monitors what is happening in day-to-day operations, checks what is happening in the wider environment, and then takes decisions on how best to deploy the limited resources it controls to achieve its objectives in the given conditions” (Garratt, p. 33). He points out that “the only group of people who do have a good idea of the nature and quality of what really happens in a business are those with the smallest voice - the employees. They face the daily consequences of the thinking and behaviour of top managers, but there is usually no process for debating, or feeding back, constructive criticism of what happens.” (Garratt, pp. 39 - 40). He suggests that directors are responsible for managing change while others in the organization carry on with day-to-day business:

Few organizations can assume today that their ‘normal’ state is static and only reactive to environmental change. The external environment is dynamic, uncertain, and constantly changing as thousands of sectoral, national and international pressures react within it. To cope with such dynamism it is necessary to adopt the notion of ‘proactivity’, rather than reactivity, then to separate the key hierarchical managerial roles in the organization, ensure that people are properly trained and developed to play those roles competently, and then have a robust process for integrating them. (Garratt, pp. 70 - 71)

Directors are policy makers. Strategy and tactics are operational matters, and should be decided below board level, but above operations, with information flows organised so

that direction on policy, strategy and tactics always flows down while information about the implementation of all three flow up to test the quality of direction (Garratt, 1987, p. 74).

In considering the tendency of new chief executives to impose change in order to demonstrate their control of an organization, Garratt points out the negative consequences of failing to address human resource issues. Discussing Bion's work at the Tavistock Institute, he explains that professionals working in organizations are comfortable in dealing with the technical aspects of interactions, whilst being both uncertain and untrained in managing the social emotional aspects of work relationships (Garratt, 1987, pp. 101 - 102). In advocating an action learning approach to organizational development, Garratt points to "change as an attitudinal and knowledge-reframing process which needs to be combined with the political process of coalition design for it to be effective." (p. 61). The questions to consider in forming such coalitions are three: who has hard information which defines the dimensions of the problem; who will be directly involved with and committed to the outcomes; and who has the power to marshal the resources required to implement changes (Garratt, p. 61). Garratt points out directors' responsibility for creating "cultures...[which] are positive and enabling rather than negative and blocking" and advocates "the ability to tolerate subordinates making mistakes provided they learn." (Garratt, p. 113). He develops a hierarchy of cultures to be managed within organizations, ranging from *Meta*, integrating culture, at the top; through *Mega*, national culture; *Micro*, organizational culture (Handy's 1985 power, role, task and people cultures); to *Tribal*, specialist and departmental cultures (Garratt, p. 113).

Short-termism is a major concern for Garratt:

[It] takes about eighteen months for the chief executive to build an effective system which blends his or her wishes with the culture and aspirations of the people who comprise the organization....

The joke is that some research also shows that in the current turbulent circumstances the normal period within which a chief executive moves on from the organization is between twenty-four and thirty months. (Garratt, 1987, p. 35) He is concerned that “the shareholders, particularly the ‘institutions’, seem content to measure managerial effectiveness on such short-term issues as profit and dividend growth.... They do not measure the quality of managerial thought and action nor the longer-term ability to successfully guide the business towards market share and continuing product development.” (Garratt, p. 39). Unlike family firms, where there is a commitment to strengthen the business for future generations, “it is considerably easier for shareholders to sell out and try another company rather than try to improve the one in which they have invested.” (Garratt, p. 39).

Garratt (1987) argues that there is a push-me pull-you effect as directors improve their own learning abilities and set learning agendas for workers at every level of the business:

The interplay between the personally-orientated learning cycle for personal and director development agendas and the organizationally-orientated learning cycle of the team and business development agendas can be shown using a double-loop learning model. (Garratt, pp. 128 - 129)

He suggests that committing to the set of learning processes he recommends will improve organizations’ abilities to manage change:

Using the learning organization process attacks the issues of organizational efficiency and effectiveness simultaneously. Efficiency comes from people in the organization’s operational cycle having appropriate authority and responsibility delegated to them so that they have the commitment and discretion to do their jobs well.... Effectiveness comes from the directors putting time aside to do a decent job of monitoring the external environment, debating the issues and re-framing them. (Garratt, pp. 133 - 134)

In *The Fish Rots From the Head: The Crisis in our Boardrooms: Developing the Crucial Skills of the Competent Director* (1996), Garratt links learning to problem solving and trouble-shooting:

At its simplest and most cost-effective, the Learning Organization requires each director and manager at the beginning or end of the day to spend ten minutes with his or her direct reports asking, 'What went right?', 'What went wrong?', 'What can we do about it?' and 'Who else needs to know?'. These questions are geared to *continuously* striving to learn, to improve what the customer actually experiences (organizational effectiveness), and show the managers and accountants what they need to strive for through the efficient use of scarce resources to achieve this (organizational efficiency). (p. 29)

Garratt (1996) says:

My model of a Learning Board...places the process of learning as the pivot around which the board members revolve. This allows them to be the 'central processor' of the organization whilst allowing all parts of the enterprise to learn simultaneously to survive. (pp. 44 - 45)

Further, he lays down four conditions for boards that want to create a learning organization: to encourage individuals to learn from their daily work; to create and deploy systems to capture, to disseminate, celebrate and reward learning; to continuously transform the organization through external and internal learning; to value learning in the appraisal and reward system, and in the asset base of the organization (Garratt, p. 29). He cites Chaparral Steel as an example of a learning organization (Garratt, pp. 29 – 30).

2.7.1 COMMENT

Garrett's commitment to seeking design solutions to organizational problems characterises his approach to the learning organization. His is essentially an authoritarian, hierarchical world view, where direction-givers are responsible for leading and for strategic learning: his interests in management and learning lie at governance level.

Employees lower down in the organization operationalise decisions, and their role in organizational learning consists of improved job performance and providing constructive feedback to the board.

Like Garvin and Leonard, Garratt uses Chaparral Steel as an example of a learning organization. Like Senge, he draws on extensive consulting experience in developing his learning organization theory. Garratt's areas of special interest, including the codification of tacit knowledge, intellectual property rights, managing the political dimension of organizational life, transcultural communication, the value of diversity and ambiguity, and long-term performance indicators are perhaps even more relevant in 2003 than they were in 1987.

For Garratt, that organizations are intended to be ongoing is an unstated, unquestioned assumption. His interest in the learning organization concept is directly linked to a commitment to improving organizations' abilities to manage change and so to survive. Organizations that are temporary by choice, not by chance, are phenomena he has not addressed.

2.8 THE SIX MODELS CONSIDERED

Although each learning organization model discussed here was developed from a different perspective, all six share the following features, which can be considered, for the purposes of this study, to define the characteristics of a learning organization. They are:

- Systems thinking
- Commitment to learning, and the identification of paid time to learn in
- Experimentation, including modelling and transitional learning
- Innovation
- Team learning
- Openness
- New styles of leadership

- Sophisticated problem solving abilities
- The linking of learning to action
- Belief (whether tacit or explicit) in the importance of organizational longevity

Not every theorist or group subscribes equally to each, but all agree, implicitly or explicitly, that these are essential and defining characteristics of the learning organization. Other ideas, such as: an emphasis on the whole person, shared vision, knowledge integration, localness, transformational aspects of open-ended learning, and employment practices were highlighted by some, but not all, theorists as important.

Chapter five, which considers how temporary organizations such as UK film units learn, examines three of these common learning organization criteria: (i) learning tied to action, (ii) problem solving, and (iii) commitment to learning. These themes were selected because, in addition to forming core elements of the six models discussed above, each was also the basis of interesting and replicated fieldwork findings. Data and theory both suggested these areas of organizational behaviour as worthy of serious consideration. Chapter five goes on to address three more strong themes that emerged during coding: (iv) temporariness; (v) employment practices and (vi) networking. Six themes in total are considered.

These learning organization models assume that learning and knowledge creation and exploitation must be a long-term process that could not take place under circumstances other than those of continuous and continuing organizational existence and evolution.

This assumption will be tested. As Daskalaki and Blair (2002) note,

Much management theory, and theories of knowledge in that sphere, assumes the notion of organizational permanence (or at least its desirability). These approaches assume a very rigid conceptualization of the term 'knowledge', attaching a far greater importance to the impact of geographical boundaries and permanent structures on the process of learning. (p. 2)

In some respects, learning organization theorists can be seen as representing points on a particular continuum. For example, Garratt's interest lies in company directors who learn and lead, whilst the two UK groups (Jones and Hendry; Pedler, Burgoyne, and Boydell) advocate a spiritual mode of operation, suggesting a new world order involving fundamental considerations outside the organization. The exploration of such differences is beyond the scope of this study.

Even though key theorists agree on many points, very little formal research has been undertaken to determine if successful organizations actually live out these learning organization ideas and beliefs (are they good learners?), or if adopting these approaches can help *sick* organizations to improve their performances.

Blair, Grey and Randle (2001) have noted the belief that temporary organizations such as film units will provide:

‘Good’ jobs which through being knowledge based are thought to be qualitatively ‘better’ than routine manual or clerical work. The ill-defined and largely spurious label of knowledge work with its attendant difficulties (Thompson and Warhurst 1998) is never adequately defined and so the implications of such types of work are left unaddressed by proponents. (p. 4)

An implication of learning organization theory is that organizations that are highly successful in climates of rapid and extreme change must, per force, be learning organizations. One reason film units were chosen as loci in which to examine learning organization theory was to test this assumption. The detailed rationale for selecting film units as a setting for fieldwork was explained in chapter one.

Learning organization theoreticians have worked principally either with or for large clients (one thousand or more employees) in developed-nation private sector contexts, with managers in leadership development training settings, and with business and management students. These are particular arenas of practice. Whether or not this body of

ideas is equally relevant to public sector and not-for-profit organizations or in the developing world is beyond the scope of this study. However, examining these theories in the context of film units does begin to explore their relevance to SMEs and to temporary organizations.

Learning organization theory is proving difficult to operationalise, and much of the theoretical material considered in this chapter was produced in a series of independent efforts to define terms and offer suggestions and support to managers wishing to take their organizations down the learning organization path.

The average length of a fashionable idea, the life blood of the [management] guru, has shrunk from just under fifteen years in the 1970s to under three years in the 1990s. (Clark & Greatbatch, 2002, p. 141)

In considering this body of theory as whole, I have been reminded of Chipco's generic job description which Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1990) quoted in *The Change Masters: Corporate Entrepreneurs at Work*: "Do anything you want to as long as you are predictable, do not fail, and do the right thing." (p. 133). There is a similar lack of focus and definition within this body of theory which renders it ripe for a variety of interpretations. In a dynamic context like Chaparral, which is grounded deeply in specific practices and learning protocols, the wide-open possibilities of learning organization theory have been welcome and useful. Other organizations which don't already know where they are headed are having great difficulty making progress with such a generic model.

Nevertheless, learning organization theorists are contributing to a broad international surge of interest in the increasing significance of learning and knowledge for all organizations. Most organizations will eventually benefit from some of the ideas and research findings which are beginning to emerge as a result of this ongoing process.

The six models discussed in this chapter have been produced either by scholarly consultants - management consultants who have university affiliations - or by academics who undertake management consultancy work. There has been serious criticism of such practitioners and researchers:

In psychology, the term *selective perception* is used to indicate an individual's propensity to perceive only selected parts of reality. Hence, in the context of the academic researcher or management consultant, the problems confronting a company may be viewed through different glasses that restrict the field of vision to certain phenomena.... Selectivity is essential when we are confronted with an overwhelming mass of stimuli. Theories, models, checklists, and so forth help to select both the phenomena to be studied and the phenomena to be excluded. The danger is a belief that one has selected what is of general relevance and that one has observed all that is required to be seen. Creativity philosopher Edward de Bono has put forward the concept of *lateral thinking* as opposed to *vertical thinking*. (Gummesson, 2000, pp. 60 - 62)

Gummesson then quotes de Bono's explanation:

[It is] not possible to dig a hole in a different place by digging the same hole deeper. Logic is the tool that is used to dig deep holes deeper and bigger, to make them altogether better holes. But if the hole is in the wrong place, then no amount of improvement is going to put it in the right place. No matter how obvious this may seem to every digger, it is still easier to go on digging in the same hold than to start all over again in a new place. Vertical thinking is digging the same hole deeper; lateral thinking is trying again elsewhere. (Gummesson, pp. 60 - 62)

Gummesson applies de Bono's logic to management consultancy:

Management consultants often exhibit blocked preunderstanding when churning out existing models and checklists irrespective of the nature of the problem.... It is quite conceivable that researchers may choose to work with a certain type of theory and methodology rather than adopt too many approaches. At the same time, they may consistently work on problems to which their standardized approaches are well suited and stay away from other kinds of problems. Hence, blocked

preunderstanding relates to the consistent application by researchers/consultants of their favorite preconceptions in the belief that they have universal validity. Someone has said that, 'for he who has a hammer, every problem is a nail.' In this spirit, we may call the use of a single, packaged solution to multiple types of problems a case of the *hammer-and-nail syndrome*. The consultants' preunderstanding and their models and methods are assets as long as they sell their services solely in situations in which they match a current client problem. There is a risk that the commercial side of consultancy will predominate with the result that they 'milk the client,' leaving questions of professionalism far down the list of priorities. By the same token, there is a risk that the academic researcher's first priority will be to exploit opportunities for research funding. (p. 66)

Why was learning organization theory generated between business and management schools and sites of practice? What implication has such a field of genesis for learning organization theory and for business and management schools?

2.9 BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT EDUCATION, M2K AND LEARNING ORGANIZATION THEORY

Clark and Greatbatch (2002) have described the nexus of relationships necessary to the creation and sustenance of management gurus:

A guru is located at the centre of a web of cooperative relationships which are essential to the final outcome. A guru, from this point of view, is not a solo performer who possesses rare and special insight. Rather, this status is conferred on an individual as a result of the joint endeavours of all those people who cooperated in the creation and fashioning of his ideas. Without this network of collaborative relationships these gurus may have remained would-be gurus. This suggests that gurus' success is in part determined by the alignment of their support personnel. (pp. 143 - 144)

Management gurus and management schools need sites of practice:

Consulting and research are integrated in an action science. Consulting to practitioners on their specific problems is simultaneously research into the problems managers have in realizing a new strategy and probing a new environment. Such an activity is also the realization of a new strategy for scholarly consultants, a probe in a new environment, up to now mostly avoided by academics and practitioners alike. (Argyris & Schön, 1978, pp. 279 - 280)

It is no accident that business and management schools have seized on learning organization theory. Business and management educators in the USA and the UK are worried about the future. Business and management students are voting with their feet, and sponsoring organizations are making their own arrangements to train and educate staff:

As a reaction to the criticisms of business schools and a growing recognition of the potential importance of corporate education, over 1400 organizations in America have internalized education activities, mainly by developing self-managing 'corporate universities.' (Starkey & Madan, 2001, p. S15)

New fields of competition are opening up in business and management education:

The business of providing executive training is now estimated to be an \$800 million industry, according to *BusinessWeek* estimates....Companies prefer to cherry-pick professors because when they subcontract to a university they're restrained by the school's resources....That's not what all B-schools [business schools] like to hear. Jordi Canals, dean of IESE Business School, ranked No. 1 for custom executive education programs in *BusinessWeek*'s rating, says: 'Good schools are trying to stop [the cherry-picking] because it starts to mean that your professors become your competitors.' (Schneider, 2001)

Meanwhile, an important new market niche is emerging. Wind and Nueno are quoted by Starkey and Madan in "Bridging the Relevance Gap: Aligning Stakeholders in the Future of Management Research" as saying:

'Porras (2000) suggests that in the next twenty years the environmental demands placed on business schools will change radically and that the most critical changes will take place in the executive education market, the demand for which will accelerate dramatically. The evidence from the USA is that the market for business education will shift from an undergraduate and MBA focus to a concern with the education and development needs of those who already have Masters-level management education. Currently in the USA there are over 1.8 million MBAs. By the year 2020 it is predicted that there will be over 3 million. Unless business schools respond to the challenges of developing knowledge relevant to this changing customer base they run the risk of obsolescence, to be replaced by new providers, perhaps management consulting firms or the burgeoning corporate university 'movement', that is perceived, by some clients, as better able to fill the relevance gap.' (Starkey & Madan, 2001, p. S6)

Business and management schools are struggling to reposition themselves in order to perform more effectively in a rapidly evolving marketplace. There is a crisis at the heart of business and management education: what is it that these institutions are supposed to be doing?

Is their primary purpose research and publication of research results? Is it developing our understanding of human behaviour in contexts important to business and society? Some authors, such as Argyris and Schön (1974), argue that the heart of education lies in changing behaviour to make it more effective, and this is the underlying principle behind many of the discussions currently taking place in the UK. If one accepts that research should have as a major concern changing behaviour - and this fits with the M2K [Mode 2 knowledge] approach - then it raises important questions about what kind of research is best suited to do this, and how it is best disseminated. If business schools' research mission, and thus their mandate to create knowledge, is increasingly out of touch with the aspirations of stakeholders and fund-providers because it is judged guilty of a relevance gap, then it raises critical issues of role justification and, ultimately, long-term survival. (Starkey & Madan, 2001, pp. S5 - S6)

Management schools have been criticised for failing properly to capitalise on their expertise. Starkey and Madan quote Wind and Nueno again:

In the absence of theory grounded in sound academic research we have seen the proliferation of 'pop' management books, filling the business shelves in bookshops and airports. In the view of Colin Crook, former Senior Technology Officer at Citicorp and Citibank, this proliferation has occurred to fill a vacuum caused by lack of an adequate response by universities to the thirst for relevant knowledge. However this new literature does not fill the gap either because popular theories, on the whole, lack rigour and an objective perspective. 'Facts are confused, data are missing, the integrity of the position is simply not there. What is emerging are transitory insights which are not valid for very long, along with an incredible number of business fads without any academic work that permit business people to assess whether these fads are worthwhile or not.' (2001, p. S7)

It is important to understand that:

The management advice industry is an interrelated community of knowledge entrepreneurs and organizations which include management consultants, management gurus, business schools and mass media organizations. Each of these groups is concerned with the creation, production, and dissemination of ideas and techniques to managers. These groups compete with each other. (Clark & Greatbatch, 2002, p. 129)

2.9.1 MODE 2 KNOWLEDGE

The relationship between researchers and practitioners is governed by 'the Veblenian bargain' (Schön, 1983): from the practitioners, their problems; from the researchers, the expert knowledge whose application to those problems enables practitioners to solve them in a distinctively professional way. This view tends to take one of two forms, depending on whether the

researcher's claim to expertise rests on (1) research-based theory or (2) expert intuitions.

Each of these interpretations leads to difficulties. When researchers see themselves mainly as sources of research-based knowledge, the consequence of their interactions with practitioners is likely to be rejection or dependency. Dependency is the likely outcome if practitioners pick up the experts' esoteric knowledge and become little scientists - most often, 'little social scientists' - who use fragments of theories as ritual clichés, floating, without palpable connection to the ways in which work is actually done. This condition, which in organizations holds for much of the current use of such terms as 'organizational culture' has been described (DeMonchaux, 1992) as the 'loss of the innocent eye'. Rejection is the likely outcome if practitioners question how well researchers' theories fit the practice situation, how they stand in relation to theories held by the practitioners themselves, or whether the researchers' actual behavior is consistent with the theories they profess.

In the case of researchers seeing themselves as operating on expert intuition, rejection or dependency is again the likely outcome, but for somewhat different reasons. The researcher's intuitive expertise tends to be opaque to the practitioner, who must then choose, more or less blindly, whether to 'buy' it on a dependent basis or reject it. We cannot easily imagine how a practitioner can learn from expertise that presents itself as intuitive.... Even if we grant that organizational practitioners may sometimes learn from researchers in this way, neither the practitioner nor the researcher is likely, so long as the expertise remains tacit, to reason critically about it, hence to make a reasoned choice to accept it within limits, in certain respects and not others.

Whether research-based expertise takes the form of esoteric theory or intuition, the conventional model of expert-practitioner interaction ignores the practitioners' inquiry, their own theories and ways of reasoning

or testing ideas. What the practitioner already knows is ignored, just as conventional models of good teaching ignore the pupil's spontaneous understandings. How, then, is a practitioner's capability for inquiry thought to be enhanced as a result of interaction with a research-based expert?

(Argyris & Schön, 1978, pp. 34 - 35)

What is Mode II knowledge (M2K)? Why is it relevant to the problems that business and management schools are currently experiencing? How is M2K connected to the learning organization concept? In *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*, Gibbons et al. (1994) develop their concept of M2K.

Mode 1 knowledge (M1K) is generated within a specific academic discipline in ways that conform to accepted notions of good science. M1K tends to be theoretical. By contrast, M2K is created in transdisciplinary sites of practice and applied in the field:

In Mode 1 problems are set and solved in a context governed by the, largely academic, interests of a specific community. By contrast, Mode 2 knowledge is carried out in a context of application. Mode 1 is disciplinary while Mode 2 is transdisciplinary. Mode 1 is characterised by homogeneity, Mode 2 by heterogeneity. Organisationally, Mode 1 is hierarchical and tends to preserve its form, while Mode 2 is more heterarchical and transient. Each employs a different type of quality control. In comparison with Mode 1, Mode 2 is more socially accountable and reflexive. It includes a wider, more temporary and heterogeneous set of practitioners, collaborating on a problem defined in a specific and localised context. (Gibbons et al., 1994, p. 3)

M2K is created in a wider arena than science:

In the M1K approach it is conventional to speak of science and scientists, while the aspirations of M2K to relevance to practice make it more relevant to speak of knowledge and practitioners. (Starkey & Madan, 2001, p. S5.)

M2K organizations generate new temporary organizations focused on new problems:

Though problems may be transient and groups short-lived, the organization and communication pattern persists as a matrix from which further groups and networks, dedicated to different problems, will be formed. (Gibbons et al., 1994, p. 6)

M2K organizations arise in response to exciting problem and exhilarating collaborators:

Contexts of application are often the sites of challenging intellectual problems and involvement in Mode 2 allows access to these and promises close collaboration with experts from a wide range of backgrounds. For many this can be a very stimulating work environment. Mode 2 shows no particular inclination to become institutionalised in the conventional pattern. (Gibbons et al., 1994, p.10)

M2K production suits the nature of evolving market demands on business and management schools. It lends itself to practical problem solving in the field, and builds on the inherently transdisciplinary nature of business and management studies, which Pettigrew has commented on:

Management is not a discipline, but represents a confluence of different fields of inquiry. The field is certainly multidisciplinary, with many of its early practitioners receiving their training in social anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, mathematics and engineering. This early disciplinary diversity has now been overlaid by the development of a string of sub-fields.... Further fragmentation has occurred as sub-fields such as international business, operations management and public-sector management have appeared as mobilizing research and teaching themes. There has also been pressure for management to become a practically-oriented social science....

This growing intellectual diversity has accelerated as the contributors to management knowledge have spread way beyond the university sector to include consulting firms, training agencies and contract research institutions. Further varieties of knowledge and knowledge production processes have arise from the changing economic and political context of business post-1970, and also from the different intellectual and social organization of the social sciences and management in different nation states and continents. The depth and extent of this knowledge differentiation has led Whitley (2000) to argue that there is little likelihood of a collapse down to any singular mode of knowledge production - whether Mode 2 or any other. Fragmented adhocracies (argues Whitely (2000)) are the norm and not the exception for most scientific fields in 2000. (2001, p. S63)

M2K approaches enable business and management schools to become powerful hubs of vast networks involving current students, former students, internal academics and academics from other departments/schools (and from other universities), as well as experts from industry and a range of consultants attached to the institution in one way or another:

Socially distributed knowledge production is tending towards the form of a global web whose numbers of inter-connections are being continuously expanded by the creation of new sites of production. As a consequence, in Mode 2 communications are crucial. At present this is maintained partly through formal collaborative arrangements and strategic alliances and partly through informal networks backed up by rapid transportation and electronic communications.... Mode 2, then, is both a cause and a consumer of innovations which enhance the flow and transformation of information. (Gibbons et al., 1994, p. 14)

The learning organization theoreticians discussed in this chapter are business and management academics who also happen to be management consultants. All have developed their knowledge, at least in part, through working with clients in the field:

Management consultancies, particularly, are identifying increasing opportunities in extending their services into executive education, sometimes with the collaboration of academics, particularly in the area of action learning aligned with issues of business strategy. (Starkey & Madan, 2001, p. S7)

Although such scholarly consultants do pose a potential threat to business and management schools, they also offer a vital lifeline to prosperity, and, with proper management, are probably better “inside the tent pissing out, [rather] than outside the tent pissing in.” (Johnson, 1971). They can be invaluable conduits between the worlds of theory and practice. They can build the reputation of their institutions through their own consultancy work and publications, as all the learning organization theorists and groups mentioned earlier in this chapter have done. They provide credible, visible assurance to organizations that business and management schools can deliver practical management education which has a positive impact on business outcomes. Such consultants perform a research and development function for their schools, trying out ideas and approaches before they are adopted for teaching or formal research.

In so far as learning organization theory synthesizes practice, it can fairly be described as having been developed through M2K approaches to learning. Furthermore, M2K issues underpin learning organization theory. Gibbons et al. (1994) describe M2K characteristics like this: M2K is carried out in a context of application, M2K is transdisciplinary, M2K is heterogenous, M2K is heterarchical and transient, M2K is socially accountable and reflexive. It includes a wide, temporary and heterogenous set of practitioners, collaborating on a problem defined in a specific and localised context. M2K solutions go beyond a single discipline, M2K results are diffused as practitioners move to new problem solving contexts and flexible M2K problem solving teams change as requirements evolve (pp. 3 - 6). All these qualities reflect learning organization theory's genesis in variants of M2K practice, and all have been encompassed within learning organization theory in some respect. It will become apparent in chapter six that M2K is also highly relevant to the ways that temporary organizations such as film units learn.

2.10 CONCLUSIONS

My view now, as then, is that the complexity and uncertainty of the knowledge production process, demand of us the exploration of many different types of knowledge production, user engagement and mechanisms of impact. (Pettigrew, 2001, p. S62)

Like Pettigrew, Gummesson (2000) has suggested that diverse problems require diverse solutions. As reported earlier, he has criticised the use of standardised consultancy approaches as failing to fit the range of problems encountered in the field. Learning organization theory does offer a standard consultancy approach to organizational learning, and this study explores the validity of such an approach in the context of a critical case study using an extreme organizational example: the UK's feature film production sector.

Learning organization theory was developed by scholarly consultants, academics working in business schools who also operated as management consultants, in sites of practice. Business schools have particular pecuniary and reputational interests in linking their academics with practical problem solving in the field, and this notion was explored in section 2.9.1 above.

Learning organization theory focuses around knowledge production, distribution and control, the notion of intellectual property, and the belief that learning is linked both to action and to economic success: it is alleged that successful learning organizations behave differently, and that learning organizations function better than their competitors. Despite sometimes significant differences, the six theorists considered in this chapter share certain assumptions about organizations, and agree on a substantial core of common elements which were discussed in section 2.8 above: systems thinking; commitment to learning and the identification of paid time to learn in; experimentation, including modelling and transitional learning; innovation; team learning; openness; new styles of leadership; sophisticated problem solving abilities; the linking of learning to action; and belief

(whether tacit or explicit) in the importance of organizational longevity. They also agree that learning organization theory can be applied to any type of organization.

However, as reported earlier in this chapter, learning organization theory does not seem to have a basis in formal research. Nor has it been rigorously tested in the field. It has proved difficult to operationalise. It is notable that a number of high-profile firms once associated with the concept, Shell, for example, are currently experiencing severe financial and ethical problems. Michael Hann, writing in *The Guardian*, said,

The contrast between Shell's reputation - as a superbly run company - and the reality was what shocked most observers.... As Alex Brummer put it in the **Daily Mail**: 'No one at Shell can deny there was a cataclysmic failure of accountability which delivered enormous damage to its reputation and even its credit rating.' 'Where should Shell go from here?' pondered the FT in its leader column. 'One lesson of (Monday's report) is that the non-executive board members of Shell's separate UK and Dutch parent companies need to be far more active in supervising the joint group's managers. Perhaps they can do this effectively only by combining forces through a merger that would produce a more transparent company.' (2004, pp. 1 – 2.)

According to Thomas and Chataway (1999), a model's "simplified description must provide a valid explanation of what happens and not a distortion or piece of wishful thinking" and "the model must correspond to an ideal relevant to the work of some agency." (pp. 16 - 17).

This study explores whether or not learning organization theory "applies to new and varied situations as differentiated from those situations [in] which it was originally [developed]" (Strauss & Corbin, p. 51). Specifically, an embedded case study is used to compare learning practices and behaviours within the UK's feature film production sector with aspects of how successful organizations are supposed to learn according to learning organization theory.

Chapters three and four explore the context in which UK films are produced and examine two embedded case studies of UK film production. Chapter five considers how temporary organizations such as film units learn in function of six themes that were well represented in fieldwork data. Chapter six considers whether or not film units are learning organizations and discusses special considerations related to the temporary nature of film units. It concludes with recommendations and suggestions for future research and says why film units are distinctive temporary organizations.

CHAPTER THREE

THE UK FEATURE FILM INDUSTRY: PRODUCING A FEATURE

In all areas of social action, there has evolved a powerful image of organizations caught up in reciprocal transactions with the environments in which they are embedded. (Argyris & Schön, 1978, pp. xviii-xix)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

How do temporary organizations such as film units learn? In order to answer this research question, I had to study temporary organizations. For the purposes of this research, I based my definition of an organization on Argyris and Schön (1978) and Handy (1976). Handy suggests that an organization is a collection of individuals operating within a political system which has “Defined boundaries (so that the membership is known); Goals and values; Administrative mechanisms; Hierarchies of power” (p. 18). Handy also says that organizational activity creates matrices of power and influence.

In their book *Organizational Learning II* Argyris and Schön suggest that there are two types of organizations: one type arises spontaneously: it is temporary, informal and functions as a co-operative system (1978, pp. 9 - 10). The other type is an agency: “an *agency* is a collection of people that makes decisions, delegates authority for action and monitors membership, all on a continuing basis.” (p.10).) Informal agencies operate “without a formal plan or identified leaders” (p. 10) which “suggest[s] the existence of culturally specific schemas of organizing that are familiar to all members of the culture and capable of being reproduced again and again with infinite variation.” (p.10). Formal agencies are organizations with explicit rules, legal status and:

...a complex and detailed articulation of roles and rules, proceduralized task systems, hierarchical and pyramidally organized layers of authority (Weber, in

A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, 1957). Such complex task systems may be tightly or loosely coupled, rigid or variable. (pp. 10 - 11)

Argyris and Schön suggest that a collectivity which meets either set of conditions “so that its members can *act* for it, may be said to learn when its members *learn* for it, carrying out on its behalf a process of inquiry that results in a learning product.” (p. 11). Film units fall amongst these definitions, being temporary formal agencies which are culturally specific and re-engineered in a unique format on each occasion that a unit is formed. They meet Argyris and Schön’s “basic definition of the conditions for organizational action: they are cooperative systems governed by the constitutional principles of a polis” (p. 11) and can therefore be said to be capable of learning.

I defined *temporary* as a time span of less than twelve months in active production. This discounts the pre-pre production stage of production, described later in this chapter, on the basis that units begin properly to be assembled as organizations during pre-production.

UK film units prove excellent loci for research on learning in temporary organizations for reasons to do with the British film production industry and the nature of feature film making, which are explained below. Considering film units, the freelance contract workers of whom they are comprised, and the overall British production sector proved to be a nice way of studying my principal research question.

This chapter describes the structure and current state of the British feature film industry, focusing on a specific type of temporary organization, feature film units, and their role as the manufacturers of films. It reflects on the economic impact of UK film production, the history of the sector, and film production as a cultural industry. Working Title Films is highlighted as a case study of current trends in British film production. The processes of artisanal film making are discussed, with a special section on the impact of digital technology. Finally, government and industry perceptions of learning and management in units are considered, and an overview of the industry is offered.

3.2 THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF UK FILM PRODUCTION

‘Film is an intensely competitive global industry, as well as a cultural activity, which, when we get it right, promotes the UK all over the world while making a significant contribution to the British economy.’ [John Woodward, Chief Executive, The Film Council]. (Kennedy, 2003, p. 7)

Film and video make an important contribution to the UK’s economy. The sector has been described by Blair and Rainnie (1998) as employing more people than the car industry (p. 2). Using the measure of added value - the difference between the costs that go into a company’s products and what customers pay for them - is a standard measure of profitability (*Added Value*, n.d.):

The gross value added of film and video activities increased from £956 million in 1995 to £1,700 million in 1998 but decreased over the next two years. In 1998 value added was estimated to be £1.5 billion and turnover totalled £3.6 billion...In 1999 the film industry generated exports totalling £653 million while imports totalled £375 million. Receipts from abroad to film companies in the U.K. increased from £581 million in 1998 to £653 million in 1999. (7. *Film & Video*, n.d.)

Given the tiny size of the UK’s feature film output - only 827 features were produced in the decade from 1990 to 1999 (*Number of UK Feature Films Produced 1912 - 2000*, n.d.)

- UK films can perform extraordinarily well in the global marketplace. For example,

The financial success of *The Crying Game* in the US was astonishing. It became 1993’s most profitable film based on the gap between negative cost [the cost of making the film] and domestic gross [box-office returns in the USA], and was the only independent production to figure in the top fifteen titles. Reckoning a budget of \$5 million and a box-office take of \$59,348,005, the film’s ratio of 11.9 was

nearly double that of the second most profitable title, *Jurassic Park* (*Screen International*, 14-20 January 1994). (Giles, 1997, p. 50)

UK films are critically acclaimed too. For ‘*The Crying Game*’, financial and critical success went hand in hand, which does not always happen:

‘An astonishingly good and daring film that richly develops several intertwined thematic lines, [taking] risks that are stunningly rewarded’ (Todd McCarthy, *Variety*, 14 September 1992). (Giles, 1997, p. 46)

3.3 FILM PRODUCTION AS A CULTURAL INDUSTRY

‘Look, there is no business model in film that works,’ continues Brown (editor-in-chief of *Screen International*). ‘The worst business models work if you have a hit; the best business models fail if you don’t. It’s not about business models. You either decide you want to be in the film business or you don’t.’ (Kaufman, 2002, p. 3)

In his book *The Cultural Industries* (2002), David Hesmondhalgh identifies a variety of characteristics and problems shared by cultural industries, which he defines as businesses that “deal with the industrial production and circulation of texts” (p. 12) and explains:

What defines a text, then, is a matter of degree, a question of balance between its functional and communicative aspects (see Hirsch 1990/1972 for a similar argument). Texts (songs, narratives, performances) are heavy on signification and tend to be light on functionality and they are created with this communicative goal primarily in mind. (p. 12)

Businesses in the cultural industries are risky:

They are centred on the production of texts to be bought and sold.... Audiences use cultural commodities in highly volatile and unpredictable ways, often in order to express their difference from other people (Garnham, 1990: 161).⁸ As a result, fashionable performers or styles, even if heavily marketed, can suddenly come to

be perceived as outmoded, and other texts can become unexpectedly successful.
(p. 18)

Texts have high production costs and low reproduction values, which is to say that it costs a lot to make an original, and almost nothing to make infinite copies of it:

Most cultural commodities have high fixed costs and low variable costs: a record can cost a lot to make, because of all the time and effort that has to go into composition, recording, mixing and editing to get the right sound for its makers and their intended audience. But once 'the first copy' is made, all subsequent copies are relatively cheap to reproduce. The important point here is the ratio between production and reproduction costs.... The much higher ratio of fixed costs to variable costs in the cultural industries means that big hits are extremely profitable. This is because, beyond the break-even point, the profit made from the sale of every extra unit can be considerable,⁹ and can compensate for the inevitably high number of misses that comes about as a result of the volatile and unpredictable nature of demand. (pp. 18 - 19)

Hesmondhalgh's (2002) explanations of how cultural industries address these difficulties have special relevance for film:

Companies tend to offset misses against hits through 'over-production'.... This is one of the pressures towards greater size for cultural companies; though there are countervailing tendencies which favour smaller companies....

Another way for cultural-industry companies to cope with the high levels of risk in the sector is to minimise the danger of misses, through 'formatting' their cultural products (Ryan, 1992). One major means of formatting is *the star system*....

Another crucial means of formatting is the use of *genre*.... Finally, *the serial* remains an important type of formatting, where authorship and genre are still often significant, but less so. (pp. 19 - 21)

These mechanisms are familiar in film, and have, in part, been responsible for Hollywood's domination of the medium. Independent producers in the UK and small UK

studios find such strategies difficult to organise and finance on a sustainable basis, of which more below.

3.4 TRENDS IN UK FILM PRODUCTION

Indeed, it is surprising the number of people - Lady Yule, John Maxwell, Lord Rank - who believed in the principle of lasting success for British films but had been unable to make the kind of film on which lasting success depended. (Betts, 1973, p. 93)

A history of British film production, distribution and exhibition lies outside the scope of this study. However, a number of key factors which have shaped or are continuing to shape the UK industry in distinctive ways are briefly mentioned in this section.

From the very first public cinema exhibition in the UK, organised by “a representative of the French producers, the Lumière brothers, at Marlborough Hall in Regent Street, London, on 21 February 1896” (Street, 2002, p. 4), film production and exhibition in the UK has been dominated by foreign competitors, initially by the French and latterly by Hollywood. Betts (1973), Street (2002), White (n.d.) and Warren (2001) agree that from the early years of the twentieth century, Britain was flooded with foreign product. This remains true today. Various historical explanations have been put forward, most notably the disruption to European production caused by both World Wars (thereby strengthening the position of Hollywood as a production centre, and, by extension, the position of imported films from the USA in Europe (Warren, 2001, p. 58), and a British tendency to lag behind the rest of Europe and the USA in exploiting new technologies (White, n.d., p. 1). Perhaps the most significant factor has been the size of the USA’s English language domestic market, and the hegemony that USA distributors established domestically and internationally from the early years of the twentieth century:

Kristin Thompson (1985) has shown how from 1909 American producers concentrated on distributing their films abroad. Britain was an especially

important market because of London's position as the centre for international trade and the world's clearing house for film.... This had an impact on British producers in terms of creating an example of the stylistics of popular cinema and on audiences in terms of inculcating codes of generic expectation and viewing habits. (Street, 2002, pp. 5 - 6)

The First World war in particular "greatly assisted American film companies to secure the supply to their domestic market, free from the intrusion of European imports" (Blair & Rainnie, 1998, p. 9). This had a very significant knock-on effect:

When Korda, Rank, Lord Grade and Goldcrest attempted to break into the American market, they were never successful in securing more than one-off successes, often not making a profit because the films had cost so much in the first place. Hollywood's high production values and budgets dictated a style which British producers were not resourced to emulate. As long as distribution and exhibition were dominated by American interests it was equally difficult for lower budget, domestically oriented films to get shown. (Street, 2002, p. 24)

A Daily Express editorial of 1927 quoted by Blair and Rainnie (1998) summed up the problem:

'The bulk of picture goers are Americanised to an extent that makes them regard the British film as a foreign film. They talk America, think America, dream America; we have several million people, mostly women, who, to all intents and purposes, are temporary American citizens.' (p. 10)

The overwhelming success of foreign product in the UK meant an ongoing series of crises in British film production. As early as 1924 "nearly every British studio was closed" (Warren, 2001, p. 58). Nevertheless, films continued to be produced in the UK through Hollywood studios; indigenous studios such as Elstree, Pinewood, and Shepperton (Warren); co-productions of various types; and by small companies and independent producers, sometimes under very difficult circumstances, as during World War II.

Successive British governments have attempted to strengthen indigenous production, and particularly independent producers, throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first through a series of legislative and fiscal measures, including (at various times) tariffs, levies, capital allowances, grants, loans and quotas. At present, Section 48 tax breaks, created by Chancellor Gordon Brown in the 1997 budget and due to expire in 2005, include sales and leaseback, production, and the enterprise investment scheme. (Hellen, 2003, pp. 1 – 3). “Martin Churchill, publishers of Tax Efficient Review, said film partnership schemes sheltered taxable income of £1.7 billion in the year 2002 – 2003” (Hellen, p. 1). These attempts have all contributed to keeping independent film production afloat in the UK, but have often favoured foreign producers, particularly those from the USA: “The whole question of the structure of the industry was influenced by relations with America” (Street, 2002, p. 14).

Partly as a result of these successive waves of legislation and schemes, and also because of market forces, two trends which continue today were already discernible in British features from the first quarter of the twentieth century: internationally successful films produced in the UK tended to have an American star; and outstanding British talent, whether in front of the lens or behind it, was poached by Hollywood.

Michael Balcon’s highly successful *Woman to Woman* (1923), illustrates both points. Directed by Graham Cutts, and starring American actress Betty Compson, who was paid the then fabulous sum of £1,000 a week, the film did well, especially in the USA, largely because it had an American star. It gave Alfred Hitchcock, who was the assistant director (Betts, 1973, p. 118), his first significant job in film. “This drama of women in conflict gave a prestige to British pictures which they badly needed. The starring of Americans was soon to become standard practice.” (Betts, 1973, pp. 59 - 60). By 1939, Hitchcock was off to join David Selznick in Hollywood (Betts, 1973, p. 123).

A third strand has been developing over the past thirty to forty years: the growth of specialist services and facilities intended to attract foreign productions to London, making

the city effectively an international facilities house and the epicentre of film production in the UK. As Blair and Rainnie (1998) point out: “Flexibly specialised industries are often highly agglomerated in space owing to the existence of dense transaction relations between firms.” (p. 4). Frederiksen and Lorenzen (2002) suggest that “national or regional *social institutions*, like information sharing and reputation effects, may bring down coordination costs. In particular, such effects are strong in regional *clusters* with a high density of skilled labor, customers, suppliers, specialized organizations..., weak social ties (Granovetter, 1973) and epistemic communities (Casson & Godley, 2000).” (p. 2) and this is demonstrated in London’s emergence as an international hub for film production able to compete on price and expert technological skills.

After the collapse of the British studio system in the late seventies, the one bright spot in production was the growing domestic special effects industry: “Many big Hollywood blockbusters that relied heavily on special effects were made exclusively or at least in part there [in the UK]. *Superman*, *Star Wars* and of course James Bond movies continued to be made at Pinewood” (White, n.d., p. 4). Later in this chapter, recent discouraging developments at The Mill, which is currently Britain’s biggest special effects firm, are mentioned.

Because film production in the UK has been so dominated by Hollywood, economic trends in the USA have always had a huge impact on the British industry. For example, the 1970 recession in the USA led to a withdrawal of funding in the UK, leaving British film to its own devices (White, n.d.):

American investment in Britain increased...to unprecedented levels...in the 1950s and 1960s as the trend of runaway production in Europe became an essential part of Hollywood’s overseas operations....

This trend did not, however, continue.... The majors showed catastrophic losses on big-budget extravaganzas and problems at home dictated a drastic decline in foreign investment. After a period of economic growth and artistic

exuberance in the 1960s, British producers were left without reliable sources of finance in the 1970s. (Street, 2002, pp. 15 - 20)

This led to the collapse of the UK studio system and the emergence of a sector made up of a number of independent production companies consisting of either a key individual or a small development core working through the agency of temporary organizations. They make films one at a time. In between films, these organizations barely subsist - if at all - other than to develop concepts and secure funding for the next film.

Studios still exist nowadays as businesses. Ten operate around London (Warren, 2001), but as service and space providers to producers of film, video and television, rather than as the hubs of production they once were.

This shift took place against a background of:

...general restructuring of businesses in the 1970s and 1980s.... Various phrases have been used to label this restructuring, most notably flexible specialisation (Piore and Sabel, 1984), flexible accumulation (Harvey, 1989), and post-Fordism (Hall and Jacques, 1990). (Hesmondhalgh, 2002, p. 94)

Hesmondhalgh (2002, pp. 94 - 95), drawing from Castells, mentions a number of elements which emerged at this time, and those most relevant to film include: "The 'decline' of the large corporation and the rise of interfirm networking"; "Corporate strategic alliances"; and "New methods of management" such as just-in-time inventory and quality management. These elements, already present in film production since the inception of the industry, gained momentum during this period. As Hesmondhalgh (2002) says,

Closely related to such changes is the idea of flexibility: the idea was that, as markets become ever more volatile and unpredictable, firms need to be able to switch production rapidly to conform to changing tastes. These changes are particularly interesting in the present context because...the cultural industries have had this network form for much of the complex professional era. (p. 95)

In the USA, Hollywood studios had been subcontracting to independents since the 1950s, a move described as “the disintegration of the movie industry” (Caves, 2000, p. 94). The studios were trying to:

...lower costs, and to control risk and outmanoeuvre television by producing new and spectacular genres. The studios acted as national and international distributors, and retained great power. All have eventually become divisions of large conglomerates. (Hesmondhalgh, 2001, p. 61)

This led to an explosion of independent production companies. In 1980, independents produced 58% of USA films, as compared with 28% in 1960 and 44% in 1970 (Caves, 2000, p. 96). Hesmondhalgh (2002) notes:

As cultural corporations have become bigger and more dominant, small companies have continued to boom in number. According to one analyst, 80 per cent of the Hollywood film industry is made up of companies with four employees or fewer. (p. 149)

Howkins (2001) describes the contemporary Hollywood system:

The studio behaves like a lead investor. It provides ‘intellectual capital’...in terms of benchmark management and accounting, and, if required, financial capital as a collateral against debt and insurance. The producer operates like a chief executive, putting together a complete team of people from accountants to caterers. They subcontract as much as possible.... through the producer’s personal contacts and through the studio’s formal connections. (pp. 166 - 167)

Blair and Rainnie (1998, p. 2), citing Michael Storper and Susan Christopherson, suggest that the LA film industry:

...constitutes the first documented transition of a whole industry from classic mass production to flexible specialisation, not just a specialised or marginal segment thereof. Crucially, this involves vertical disintegration of large firms and the associated rise of small specialist production units.

Blair and Rainnie note that “the vertical disintegration triggered by the Paramount decision was designed to pass risk down the supply chain with important employment implications” and quote Christopherson and Storper as saying that uncertainty was thus transmitted ““down the hierarchy of control to secondary subcontractors and, ultimately, to individual workers’” (p. 14). However, Blair and Rainnie also suggest that “the tenuous and often short-lived existence of successive waves of small firm formation would suggest that casual and unpredictable employment has been at the heart of the film industry since its emergence.” (p. 15).

Even in diminished form, the “Hollywood oligopoly” (Hesmondhalgh, 2002, p. 61) of Paramount, Fox, Warner Bros, MGM/UA, Universal, Columbia (and relative newcomer Disney) remains a far more powerful centre of film production than any in the UK (Hesmondhalgh, p. 61).

Caves notes:

Another policy of the major studios that cuts against the industry’s disintegration is the practice of maintaining ongoing relations with key talent by means of contracts covering series of films or contracts to gain a ‘first look’ at projects that they develop. Each major studio has twenty to thirty of these with directors and actors as well as producers and producing organizations.⁵¹ (2000, p. 101)

Jane Hamsher, one of the three producers (*Full Cast and Crew for Natural Born Killers* (1994), p. 4) of Oliver Stone’s *Natural Born Killers* described how she and fellow producer Don Murphy were outmanoeuvred by their director and his studio:

‘We’re the producers on this movie. Who does Oliver Stone think he is?’ said an outraged Don when I told him that Oliver had met with Woody Harrelson and decided to cast him as Mickey....

When we’d first brought *NBK* to Oliver, he wanted to cast Michael Madsen (of *Thelma and Louise* and *Reservoir Dogs* fame) in the role of Mickey. Let it be known here and now that when he told Warner Brothers and New Regency, the financiers of all his films, that *NBK* was what he wanted to do next,

they were somewhat less than enthusiastic - in fact, Warner Brothers cochairmen Bob Daly and Terry Semel openly despised the script. But if that's what Oliver wanted to make, they didn't want to lose him as one of their prize filmmakers, so they acquiesced to financing it.... If Oliver was going to insist on Madsen, they were willing to pump only \$10 million into making it....

Warners sent over a list of actors they'd approve for a budget of \$35 million.... I think their faith in Woody was due partly to his rapidly climbing box-office potential. (pp. 104 - 105)

Blair and Rainnie (1998) discuss the financial control exercised by the large studios:

The historical development of the international film industry has left distributors in a nodal and financially dominant position. As a consequence, the 'majors' like Paramount and Warner Bros., have assumed the role of bankers and investors as well as distributors (Gordon 1976; Puttnam 1997: 285) and as such control the flow of cash from exhibition back to producers. (p. 3)

and suggest:

There is an important, though subordinate, role for independents by attracting risk capital and creative talent that the majors can exploit through their control of distribution. 'The independents are important as pilot fish.' (Aksoy and Robins 1992: 11) (p. 6)

However, the LA industry is structured in such a way that it is very difficult for independents ever to realise significant revenues. Neil McCartney, editor of *Screen Finance*, is quoted by Blair and Rainnie (1998, p. 8) as saying: "Hollywood studios are basically distribution arms with a bit of production attached, a system that is set up deliberately so that distribution swallows up the money."

In the 1980s:

British production revived, particularly during the years 1983-5, followed by yet another slump in 1988-91.... Independent production companies enjoyed a brief,

but significant phase of activity, the most important companies being Goldcrest, Handmade Films, Palace Pictures, Virgin and Working Title.¹⁵ (Street, 2002, p. 21)

In the preface to *My Indecision is Final: The Rise and Fall of Goldcrest Films*, Jake Eberts and Terry Ilott (1990) characterised the chaotic and contradictory essence of film production in the UK:

Probably in no walk of life is there such confusion between reality and fantasy as in the world of the movies. It is a confusion that affects accountants and secretaries as much as actors and directors, for the glamour of film seems to rub off on everyone.... There were times, well documented in the latter half of this book, when the idea of Goldcrest was clearly a much more powerful factor in the minds of its decision makers than was the reality....

From May 1984 onwards, Goldcrest was led more by wishful thinking than by common sense. By early 1995, fantasy had run riot. (pp. xiv - xv)

Blair and Rainnie (1998) perceive the rise and fall of these firms, in the context of the UK industry's development as "simply the fifth wave of small firm formation [destined] to [be] as ephemeral as its four predecessors." (p. 13). Of the important UK production companies which arose in the 1980s, only Working Title has survived. USA majors continue to dominate Europe, accounting for over 70% of EU box office receipts in 1991 - but 93% of the UK market (Hesmondhalgh, 2002, p. 188).

Perhaps the situation is best summed up by paraphrasing Gordon's estimation of the situation for small producers in the USA thirty years ago:

Furthermore, bringing a welcome breath of reality to the new independent producer mythology, Gordon concluded that 'on the whole, producers have found that the one thing worse than being involved with a major was not being involved with a major' (Blair & Rainnie, 1998, p. 7)

At present, the only thing worse for UK independent producers than being involved with Hollywood is not being involved with Hollywood.

3.5 WORKING TITLE FILMS

Working Title is effectively a US studio in the UK. [Roger Mitchell, director of *Notting Hill*]. (Mitchell, 2003, p. 7)

For more than a decade, UK-based production company Working Title Films has been unique in consistently managing to have a slate of features in simultaneous production. The company's current British co-chairmen, Eric Fellner and Tim Bevan, started their media careers producing pop videos in the 1980s, when they were in their twenties. Bevan founded Working Title with producer Sarah Radclyffe, who left in 1990 to found her own production company. By the late 1980s, the company had developed a winning formula:

No one who saw it in 1989 thought that 'The Tall Guy' was the future of British cinema, but in many ways it was. A romantic comedy scripted by Richard Curtis, it paired posh British talent (Emma Thompson) with an imported American star (Jeff Goldblum), along with Rowan Atkinson running amok. When Working Title regrouped the same elements five years later to make 'Four Weddings and a Funeral', they moved from being big by British standards to serious players. (Morris, 2001, p. 2)

This is the same formula mentioned earlier in this chapter in connection with 1923's *Woman to Woman*, which did well, especially in the USA (Betts, 1973, pp. 59 - 60). Working Title continues to demonstrate that a production approach nearly as old as the history of British film still pays handsome dividends at the box office.

Working Title Films has turned out box office and critical hits such as:

My Beautiful Laundrette (1985)

Wish You Were Here (1987)

The Tall Guy (1989)

Bob Roberts (1992)

Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994)

Dead Man Walking (1995)
Fargo (1996)
Bean (1997)
Elizabeth (1998)
Notting Hill (1999)
Billy Elliot (2000)
Bridget Jones's Diary (2001)
My Little Eye (2002)

In 1991 Bevan and Fellner sold Working Title to the Dutch company Polygram. When Polygram got out of film, they sold Working Title (and various other media-related companies) to the Canadian group Seagram, which placed it under the management of Universal Pictures in the USA. Next came a deal between Seagram and Paris-based Vivendi: "Shares in Vivendi Universal started trading in December (2000), nearly six months after the \$34bn deal between Vivendi, Canal Plus, the French pay-TV group and Canada's Seagram." (Owen, 2001). This deal made Vivendi Universal, the global number two media group, the owner of Working Title (and Working Title Television) as well as Universal Pictures (*Vivendi group: holdings: ketupa.net media profiles: Vivendi Universal*, 2002, n.d.).

Through its Universal Pictures connection, Working Title enjoys:

...access to Hollywood money, talent and worldwide distribution through Universal Pictures and Canal Plus Image [now 51% owned by Vivendi Universal].... With Universal's world distribution network Working Title can guarantee a theatrical release for [Bevan's] film as long as the Americans like the product, a big change from his days as an independent. (Dresner, n.d., p. 2)

However, by August 2002, less than two years after starting to trade shares, Vivendi was "loaded with debt and strapped for cash" (Patsuris, 2002, pp. 1 - 2), having made losses in the first half of the year. Howkins (2001) quotes *The Wall Street Journal* on foreign take-

overs in Hollywood: “‘Even legendary businessmen who are breathtakingly successful everywhere else usually go down in utter miserable defeat in Hollywood. Whatever they tried, most have lost their shirts.’” (p. 168).

In April 2003, Owen Gibson, writing in a *Guardian Unlimited MediaGuardian.co.uk Special Report*, announced that “Vivendi Universal has officially begun the sale of its US entertainment assets, including Universal Studios” (pp. 1 - 2). By September 2003, Vivendi and General Electric’s NBC had formed *Vivendi Universal Entertainment*, combining “NBC’s broadcast network and cable television channels and Vivendi’s entertainment assets, which include Universal Studios.” (*NBC wins Vivendi battle*, 2003, p. 1).

Despite the financial problems of its parent group, Working Title has enjoyed a highly privileged position by comparison with independent producers in the UK, who, at best, may have a number of ideas in pre-pre-production development - the research, writing and funding phase of the film making process - whilst producing one feature at a time.

Blair and Rainnie (1998) have noted “small and medium sized firms in the film industry becoming precariously and dangerously embedded in the extended networks of the media and entertainment conglomerates.... The growing strength and mobility of these global image empires brings into question both the survival and sustainability of both regional and national film industries.” (p. 8). Working Title has been compromised in this way. The UK’s flagship for feature film production has, since 1991, been owned by a succession of foreign companies, and managed by another, with Bevan commuting “to the epicentre of the film industry, Los Angeles, every month. He maintains an office in LA to complement his main office in London.” (Dresner, n.d., p. 2).

Whatever happens to Working Title Films next, there is a sense of UK film production history being logically extended through the USA control of a USA/French-owned nominally British production powerhouse.

3.6 ARTISANAL FILM MAKING

Most people who write about movies don't know much about the actual problems of making one. (Goldman, 1983, p. 102)

Since the demise of the studio system in the UK, feature films have been produced on what has been described as an artisanal (as opposed to an industrial) basis:

Film making is an expensive and risky business. Each film is a costly prototype, necessarily created without any certainty that a market exists for it. While the costs of making a film are incurred at the development/production stage, revenues from exhibition do not arise until much later and accrue first to the distributor, who takes significant fees before the costs of the film are recouped and it goes into 'profit', which may not be until long after its first release. Only where there are close links between the two processes can this revenue stream be used to fund further production...the UK industry is production-led and fragmented. The production process is separate from the distribution process which is dominated by big US companies. Production remains essentially a 'cottage industry'.

Typically, companies are established to develop, finance and produce a single film, then start again from scratch on their next project. Most producers have no on-going relationship with a distributor; they cannot easily raise finance or reduce risk by developing a slate of films....This undercapitalisation and lack of direct contact with the market has a number of consequences for British producers.

Typically they are not able to produce the large budget films with the 'A list' stars and special effects which are known to have audience appeal both at home and abroad: the average budget for the wholly British films produced in 1997 was less than £3.5m compared with over £18m for the overseas films made in the UK.

(Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 1998, pp. 12 - 13)

In their paper *Working in Film: An analysis of the nature of employment in a project based industry*, Blair, Grey and Randle (2001) point out the human resources consequences of the way UK filmmaking is organized:

Often companies are set up to make only one film and experience difficulty recycling the returns from previous film productions into the development of new projects (Spectrum, 1996:26). It is also not possible to spread the risk of film production across a large number of films (National Heritage Committee, 1995). These companies do not, as a result, possess the financial resources to fund film production and commonly approach organisations such as distributors and funding bodies to secure financial backing for the production of a film (Spectrum 1996:1). They tend, for these reasons, not to be constantly involved in the principal photography stage of production (the most labour intensive phase) throughout the year, spending significant amounts of time searching for and negotiating financing deals. So, there is no opportunity for crews to work exclusively for one company over a protracted period of time.... Different groups involved at the various levels and areas of film production have varying lengths of tenure. Film crews, including groups such as the camera and sound departments, are usually only employed for the period necessary to shoot the film. However, the middle management layer, heads of departments and management support staff, are employed during the preparation phase prior to filming, as well as during the period of principal photography. (pp. 2 - 3)

Caves (2000, p. 103) points out that,

The complications of two-party contracts swell as the parties grow numerous. They may make their contributions in sequence; each needs to perform up to snuff for a valuable product to result; creative participants each have tastes about the form of their contributions; and expected rents to the project must be divided at a stage when their total amount is deeply uncertain.

This has had a formative effect on the sector, leading one participant to characterise British independent producers as “parasitic in as much as all they do is make stuff for

here and now.... I just get the impression that they're not developing anything into the future - the big boys [i.e. Working Title] do that. [Independent producers] just make [films] in whatever medium works at the time with whatever methods are being used at the time." (Jim, 1993, p. 29).

3.7 TECHNOLOGY AND PRODUCTION: DIGITAL FILM

Digital technology is set to take the possibilities for the global economic exploitation of cinema into new realms.

By September 2002, the *Screen Digest Report on the Implications of Digital Technology for the Film Industry*, a research report commissioned by the Creative Industries Division of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, acknowledged current and forthcoming radical changes to the production process (and other aspects of the industry) driven by technology. Bernard Rose, director of *ivansxtc*, *Candyman* and *Anna Karenina*, said:

HD is a major revelation that will change the motion picture industry. Independent filmmakers with creative, innovative ideas will no longer have to face an army of chequebook-wielding studio executives to get their movies made. (p. 19)

Changes mentioned included sharing (intentionally or inadvertently) scripts over the internet; discussion groups and global communities for scriptwriters; pre-production spoiler sites (internet websites which give away plot twists and promote gossip); digital marketing in pre-production; the use of personal computers as graphics tools, the particular relevance of computer aided design (CAD) to set design; and digital performers. High definition (HD) digital, such as that which meets the ITU standard of 1,920 x 1,080 pixel definition at 24 frames per second, the 24P production standard, can now almost match the image quality of 35mm film. Since post-production requires film to be transferred to video for editing purposes, especially for special effects, it is sensible to shoot digital in the first place. It is easier to watch dailies (rushes), possible to have longer takes, quicker to change magazines, and cheaper to insure since perfect digital clones can

be produced before the original material is sent anywhere. Tape is cheaper than film stock. Cameras and editing equipment for digital work can now be purchased, as opposed to rented, thus becoming part of a unit's equipment. Digital material can be posted directly onto the worldwide web.

Lower quality DV and mini-DV cameras are producing acceptable images, and successful British features such as *My Little Eye*, have been made with mini-DV technology. In New York, Madstone Films (www.madstonefilms.com) is recruiting graduates from film schools to direct very low budget films on digital. Madstone is also involved in distribution and exhibition: the company is leasing screens from exhibitors at multiplexes and installing its own digital projectors to show its own (digital) films (Creative Industries, DCMS, 2002, p. 20).

The digital implications for post-production are just as profound: William Sargent, Frame Store/The Computer Film Company says "Digital is enabling every aspect of the film process to be non-linear. The term 'post' production is a misnomer: we are now a digital studio." (Creative Industries, DCMS, 2002, p. 23). Ian Thomson of the Film Council said in March 2003 "In the space of two years, the technology has come on a lot - it's almost running away without the film-makers" (Carus, 2003, p. 3).

Pandora, a company in Kent, is cashing in on the international digital boom.

[Pandora] has been providing the film industry with post production software since 1986: its only direct competitor is in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. For the first time in cinematic history, Pandora has created software that can smooth out flaws on film in real time, a process usually done frame by frame. This significantly reduces the time it takes to correct and colour film. The film *The Magdalene Sisters* (2003), for example, was digitally manipulated with Pandora tools to give it its claustrophobic atmosphere. (Carus, 2003, p. 3)

The Film Council is to deal with the education and training implications of digital technology separately (Creative Industries, DCMS, 2002, p. 5).

3.8 PRODUCING A FEATURE FILM

Director Stanley Kubrik said:

The structure making a movie imposes on your life when you're doing it again feels like it felt each time before. So there's a wonderful, suggestive, timelessness about the structure. I'm doing exactly the same as I was doing when I was eighteen and making my first movie. It frees you from any other sense of time. (Joyce, 1996)

Freelance workers who make films in the UK agree that there is a predictable format to the production cycle: Don said "The knowledge of that well-oiled system which hasn't really changed much over the years. If you look at credits from films years ago, people are still holding the same sorts of titles and areas, although obviously lots of things have changed technically" (1996, p. 43), and Jim felt the same way (1993, p. 35).

Films are manufactured in the UK through a form of what, in early 1990s Rover terminology, was called an *extended enterprise*. In addition to the people who are directly contracted to or employed by a unit for various periods of time during its (approximately) thirty-five week active lifespan, the film unit networks with a wide variety of other companies and self-employed individuals to purchase, lease or use specialist goods and services required for particular aspects of the feature being created. These range from mundane photocopier hire to the more exotic retention of a *boat wrangler* to deal with water-related stunts and issues. As I noted while observing on *Bloody Weekend*, "Everything around here (including the camera batteries) seems to be on hire, with a logo or label on it somewhere." (1993, p. 6). Particularly during post-production, the company's purpose is almost entirely achieved through the input of external individuals and organizations, who work under the direction of the few remaining contract workers such as the director, producer and editor.

External independent providers of goods and services for film units are sensitive to the dynamic of the industry, and in turn influence it. Britain's biggest special effect firm, The Mill, which won an Oscar for its work on *Gladiator* (2000) and produced special effects for the second Harry Potter film in 2002, and for the 2002 Bond epic, announced in November 2002 that it was getting out of film in order to concentrate on advertising, rather than expanding to compete with George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic in Hollywood. In what Fiachra Gibbons, arts correspondent for *The Guardian*, described as "another crippling blow for an industry already on its knees" (Gibbons, 2002, p. 14) Robin Shenfield, The Mill's chief executive said,

We have produced work as good as the best of the Americans. But to handle more of their big event movies we needed to expand. The bigger you get the more exposed you become to fluctuations of the market, and the film industry here has become very volatile.... Five years ago when we really got into the business there was only a small number of people in London with the skill and talent to do really amazing things. Now there are around 1,000 of these really brilliant people. The problem is, however, that on really big films more and more images are needed, so it only takes two or three big films to fill London. (p. 14)

Gibbons (2002) reckons that "British special effects technicians are among the best in the world, but they rely on work from big Hollywood films. Last year inward investment from the large studios collapsed by £310m, as the aftershock of September 11 and threatened actors' and writers' strikes filtered down" and estimated that The Mill's film staff of thirty-five - a number that increased to one hundred and fifty on big projects - were likely to be made redundant (p. 14).

Citing Rawsthorn, Blair, Grey and Randle (2001) noted that project-based employment (the term *project* in this context is theirs) in film is financially motivated as far as USA producers relocating to London are concerned:

‘Whilst part of the attraction of US producers to the UK is indeed the highly skilled workforce, it is the comparatively lower labour costs and less stringent employment conditions which provide an equal, if not greater, incentive.’ (p. 4)

The industry is one of intense interrelationships and is almost entirely process based. Daskalaki & Blair (2002) have referred to film production as “a form of social interaction, a mode of action and a systemic activity” (p. 19).

Distinctions between being within a unit and providing a service to it can become very blurred. Networks are of primary importance in the production of UK features. Relationships tend to be built over a number of years and a number of films. In a world of dramatic and rapid change, sustained human connections are vital. As the following discussion of *Blue Juice* (1995) illustrates, features are made (or not) because of such enduring and complex relationships.

Key individuals involved in making the Cornish surfing feature *Blue Juice* (starring Catherine Zeta Jones) discussed their professional connections at a BFI/PACT seminar in 1996 (see Appendix B, 7.2). Carl Prechezer, the director and writer, had worked with Peter Salmi, the producer and writer, for a number of years. They shared a *Fulbright BAFTA Shell UK Film Award* to study screen writing at UCLA. Together with Tim Veglio, they wrote *Blue Juice*. Simon Relph, head of Skreba (and a former head of British Screen) and the film’s executive producer, was Peter Salmi’s external examiner at the Royal College of Art (where Salmi did a production course), and also on the Fulbright panel that made the award to Salmi and Prechezer. It was he who introduced them to David Aukin at Channel 4. Aukin funded *The Cutter*, their earlier ten minute short (which credits Relph as executive producer) and paid for several drafts of the feature script, finally helping Salmi and Prechezer to pull together a funding package of £2m, of which he provided two thirds. *Blue Juice* was produced by Skreba. When Allon Reich (at the time of this seminar Assistant Editor, Drama, Channel 4) was employed in development, he worked with both men on *The Cutter*. It is possible to think of this particular network

as a special case of supplier development: producers, directors and writers supply content. When Channel 4 developed such individuals, it was attempting to ensure that it would have the finest content available at the lowest price. Obviously Channel 4 developed many more individuals than just Salmi and Prechezer; it was stocking a *trout pool* with fresh artistic talent.

One of the ugly aspects of networking is the way in which it can maintain the status quo and create an incestuous and closed sector. This was highlighted while I was observing on *Bloody Weekend* during principal photography, on a second visit to the unit (see 7.2). The following extract is from my fieldwork notes:

The black trainees clearly felt marginalised - I was surprised that they were so direct with me about this over lunch. That they were eating together, rather than with their respective departmental colleagues, was, perhaps, an indication of the problem. Maybe all trainees feel marginalised - if so, I wonder how this is normally dealt with?

Clearly, the black trainees found it depressing that there were no other members of the unit who were black - it seemed to suggest that it would be hard going for them to get on in film production. I know from previous conversations with [Jim] that black people are rare in UK film production - he tried to get a black unit together when he was working with T.I. [a black writer and director], without success. (1993, p. 9)

3.8.1 THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

Shooting a film is like taking a stagecoach ride in the old West. At first you look forward to a nice trip. Later you just hope to reach your destination. (François Truffaut, quoted in Jones & Jolliffe, 2000, p. 384)

The technical material on production in this section has been derived mainly from the Association of Independent Producers' *AIP production guide: Production and post-*

production (1988) edited by Shelly Bancroft, and from *The Guerilla Film Makers Handbook* (2000) written by director/producer team Chris Jones and Genevieve Jolliffe.

Caves (2000) noted whereas “some creative outputs need only a single creative worker.... many, however, require diverse skilled and specialized workers.... perform[ing] at or above some level of proficiency and conformance for a viable product to result.” (p. 5). This is true of film production. In such a “mutiplicative production relationship...every input must be present and do its job...if any commercially valuable output is to result.” (Caves, p. 5).

According to Bancroft (1988), the production process can be considered as two halves: production, when principal photography is completed; and post-production, when the visual material (film or videotape) produced during principal photography is edited together and combined with elements such as sound tracks and titles in order to deliver a final showprint from which release prints are made. Production can be further subdivided into pre-pre-production, pre-production and production. These stages are described below. Post-production includes producing materials for the marketing campaign, such as trailers and stills. Making a feature film may seem a logical, tidy, linear process. What actually happens in film units, as illustrated here and in chapters four and five, is somewhat different.

3.8.2 PRE-PRE-PRODUCTION

Every feature film begins with an idea and some type of source material: a news item, play, book or original screenplay. Whoever generates or identifies this central concept and *brings it to the table*, i.e. originates the project, whether producer, director, writer or member of the cast, retains a special kind of power within the production process. *Natural Born Killers* (1994) is an excellent example. *Producer* credits went to Jane Hamsher and Don Murphy, who optioned an early Quentin Tarrantino script and brought it to the attention of director Oliver Stone. Although Hamsher and Murphy were young film school

graduates with no previous commercial production experience, having brought the project to the table, they had considerable influence over it, even though the film was line produced by the more experienced Clayton Townsend, who also received a producer credit (Hamsher, 1997).

Development funds are obtained (or not), and a script is developed, sometimes with the involvement of the producer or the director. This can literally take years, and is known as *development hell*.

Not all ideas in development make it to the cinema screen - at Working Title,

Out of every eight scripts that go into development only one is made into a film by Working Title.... Bevan can write off as much as \$1m on a single feature before a single frame is shot.... What does all this mean for the writer? Ten, twenty or thirty rewrites.... The key to success is re-writing. (Dresner, n.d., p. 2)

Jones and Jolliffe (2000, p. 42) express an even harsher understanding:

For every ten ideas, one becomes a treatment. For every ten treatments, one becomes a first draft [script]. For every ten first drafts, one becomes a final draft. For every ten final draft scripts, one gets greenlighted. For every ten greenlighted films, one gets made. For every ten films made, five bomb, two break even [immediately], two break even over time and one is a hit.

Directors' and producers' input to scripts can make a significant difference to the practicality of realising a project. An inexperienced or insufficiently commercial writer can generate scripts which are either impossible to execute, or very expensive. There is a vital link between artistic concept and realisation. If it is ignored or imperfectly understood, the quality of the feature will suffer. When it comes to completing on time, to budget, with quality, there is no substitute for experienced input at the front end of the process.

The script forms the basis of all forward planning for the unit. Don explained,

Scripts themselves are the main body of things. That's where people, 'Christ, what are we up to here?' Someone throws that [a script] on your desk, you know what you're about, then. It's a case of you as a department breaking your individual side of things down and then putting it back in, what's required individually from your department. Putting it back into the pot again with everybody else's information to then form the filming schedule. (1996, p. 37)

While a satisfactory script is being prepared, the *package* is being pulled together. The particular nature of a script, posing a unique series of problems to be solved within the unit, suggests (to a greater or lesser extent) the who, what, when, where, why and how necessary for its realisation. Inevitably, networks of contacts are activated.

Here Amanda Boyle, novice writer/director, discusses her forthcoming short film, working title *Hotel Infinity*, which concerns an infinitely expanding Swiss hotel. She explains how and why she is assembling her unit:

A valid question might be, 'How are you going to make an infinite hotel?' and this was something that took hold of me when I first read the problem. A couple of years ago, I had seen Johnny Hardstaff's animation, *History*, which was a look at the history of video games. The drawing was intricate but simple. Your eye moved along a linear timeline from left to right. The growth of the hotel seemed to lend itself to a similar kind of animation. After tracking Johnny down on the internet, we met and luckily he loved the idea...The growing of the hotel and the 'pulsing hotel' moments will be the only animated sections of the film...The special effects company The Mill has expressed an interest in creating this sequence. Johnny will mentor me on this section, as he is experienced in C.G.I. (A. Boyle, *Hotel Infinity: Director's statement*. Private communication via e-mail, 25 October 2002).

Actual involvement in a given project depends on the availability of all parties when finance has been raised, and on whether or not deals satisfying all potential participants can be achieved.

The package consists of the *producer*, the CEO; the *director*, the creative decision maker; and *talent* - the key performers. The director usually has an ongoing professional relationship with a particular *director of photography* and an *editor*, responsible for assembling the film. Both will come on board later. The producer retains a *production manager*, who is responsible for the smooth running of the unit and day-to-day cost reports. A *co-producer* may supply expertise that the original producer lacks. An *executive producer* makes the film possible in one way or another, usually bringing finance or a script to the production. A *line producer* is the organization's cost controller, taking operational responsibility for the practical process, particularly for cutting deals with facility houses. On low budget films this role is usually split between the producer and the production manager.

Hesmondhalgh (2000, pp. 52 -53) draws distinctions between team roles. Based on Ryan (1992), he suggests four types: primary creative personnel, technical craft workers, creative managers, and owners and executives. Hesmondhalgh's categories are useful, but reductive. An individual's skills, abilities, knowledge, experience and interests can considerably colour responsibilities within titles such as producer, executive producer, line manager or production manager. Some individuals whose titles are not obviously creative have significant involvement with the creation and development of texts. Various heads of department and financiers can be involved in creative aspects of the unit's work to a surprising extent. In chapter five, a location manager describes how he influences artistic decisions. Perhaps there is a difference between Hesmondhalgh's project perspective and the temporary organization emphasis of this study, or maybe there are differences between the worlds of music (his specialist interest) and film production.

A lawyer is retained, and a limited company is formed to act as the legal vehicle for making the film. Even Jones and Jolliffe (2000), writing for an extremely cost-sensitive audience (aspiring entrants to the business), recommend creating a limited company for each production: they quote Solicitor Helen Tulley of Hammond Suddards as saying:

“Without a limited company, your liabilities would then be *personal* and you could be made bankrupt.... If you don’t have a company, no-one will do business with you anyway.” (p. 26). Jones and Jolliffe insist “Thou shalt make a film through the legal mechanism of a limited company.” in their list of “The 12 Low Budget Film Commandments” (p. 298).

The producer and production manager draw up a budget which covers the production and post-production phases. The producer recruits a *casting director*, *location manager*, *accountant* and *production designer*, arranges finance for the project, organizes the completion bond, (“an instrument whereby a completion guarantor promises to the providers of the finance for a film that the film will be completed in accordance with the budget, the timescale and the script which they have approved” [Jones & Jolliffe, 2000, p. 64]) and distribution (if possible). Insurance is organised and a public relations firm identified. PR is important for the future of the project. For example, Ginger Corbett, a public relations expert, “bring[s] the film to the attention of distributors, other film makers and to the public via the press.” (Jones & Jolliffe, p. 70).

At this point, contracts have not yet been issued - they can’t be until finance is assured. Everyone on the team is being held on a promise, with production dates pencilled in. If individuals receive firm offers of work in the meantime, they face a dilemma. It is not unusual for cast or crew members to drop out at this stage. For example, on *Bloody Weekend*, the unit had failed to issue contracts to a number of performers. An actor dropped out on the penultimate day of pre-production, while I was observing. “James Green’s agent rings in. [James Green is cast as the vicar and is to be filmed on the forthcoming Monday.] James is not available on Monday - he will be in Lithuania.” (1993a, pp. 4 - 5). The part was recast within the hour.

It is the producer’s responsibility (or the executive producer’s, if there is one) to secure finance for the project. It is important that the financier(s), the producer and the director are all in agreement and therefore operating in harmony, on the nature of the feature they

are making. Caves (2000), writing about Hollywood, remarks that “paradoxically, film directors see a major creative advantage in splintered financing of films, because it means that no one monitor has much leverage for holding the director to artistic choices that will maximise the commercial value while limiting the scope for self-expression.⁵¹” (p. 115). Independent producers in the UK tend to share this point of view, possibly because the chance of identifying a single source of finance for a British film is nil.

The UK government currently channels money into film through treasury grants to the Film Council, and via the national lottery. Current funds for film production include The Development Fund, The New Cinema Fund, The Premier Fund, the Regional Investment Fund and First Light. Some lottery money is administered by Pathé Pictures, the Film Consortium and DNA Ltd. Kaufman suggests that these three National Lottery studio franchise holders, which each receive £8 million to spend annually, will not have their contracts renewed when they expire in 2003. Instead, the franchise scheme seems likely to end. It was a further blow to the UK industry in autumn 2002 when major USA and UK sales agents attended MIFED, the Milan film market, instead of the earlier London Screenings annual market (Kaufman, 2002, pp. 3 - 4).

Broadcasters such as Channel 4 and BBC Films channel funds into very low budget feature projects. Bigger producers such as Working Title and Pathé can supply important help in packaging deals for the projects in which they are interested (Collinson, 2003, p. 4 - 5). Co-production, when two or more producers, production companies, or funders collaborate on a film or slate of films, usually through joint financing, is an approach which has been around since at least the 1930s (Warren, 2001, p. 45). Co-production is increasingly favoured as a funding strategy which spreads the financial risk on a given feature. For example, *Loaded* (1994) was produced by a consortium of seven organizations, some private sector, some public: The British Film Institute, British Screen, Geissendorfer, Miramax, Movie Partners, New Zealand Film Commission and Strawberry Vale. Co-production is an approach which tends to add to the time scale and to increase the complexity of projects. Co-producers expect involvement with the script and with

casting, expecting to see bankable names in key roles. Organizations such as Eurimage enforce national spending and crew ratios as conditions of involvement.

3.8.3 LINKS BETWEEN FILM AND TELEVISION: FILMFOUR

In the end, all films end up on television, whether delivered by terrestrial, satellite or cable mechanisms. In the UK in the 1990s, the BBC and Channel 4 provided 100% funding for some features (for example, BBC's *Small Faces* and Channel 4's *Trainspotting*). When these features succeeded, the television companies got 100% of the kudos and the income that was generated. The renaissance of the UK's feature film industry during the 1990s was directly linked to television's involvement with film production.

The demise of FilmFour, the film production arm of Channel 4, the only British mini-major to rival Working Title, and an investor in both *The Crying Game* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, was announced in July 2002. The company had been badly affected by “declining television sales, foreign pre-buys and advertising” (Kaufman, 2002, p. 1):

FilmFour had gained a reputation as the most dynamic film company in the UK. But corporate consolidation, bottom line concerns, and cold feet have changed all that...Channel 4's Matt Baker says the company came to the realization that FilmFour's business strategy could not work. ‘We didn't think we'd be able to make a success of the model of making larger budget films focused on the international market,’ he says. Baker points to British rival Working Title....‘Vivendi Universal gives Working Title muscle in the marketplace and broader relationships’ he says. ‘And without that, we just didn't think we had the resources to make a successful model.’ ‘In the grand scheme of things, FilmFour did not lose much money,’ argues Colin Brown, editor-in-chief of *Screen International*, ‘.... This decision tells me that Channel 4 didn't want to be in the film business. They didn't have the stomach for it.’ (Kaufman, pp. 1 – 3)

3.8.4 PRE-PRODUCTION

Once finance is in place, and the completion guarantee agreed, the film is in pre-production. Sue (1996) said,

It's one of the skills of the producer or production manager, whoever is putting the team together, to put together a group of people who will gel together, who will have good creative chemistry. When that doesn't happen it's really awful. When there's bickering, when there's tension between people, it becomes very negative. (p. 32)

Howkins (2001) has pointed out that freelances are recruited for only the amount of time their particular skills are required, and extends the term *just-in-time* to them:

The ordinary economy uses the term 'just-in-time' to describe a logistics system that saves money by maintaining very low levels of stock and obtains an item only if and when a customer wants it.... I use the same term to describe people who are hired only when and where they are wanted. These people have two assets: their specific expertise, and their social ability to slot into a group of people and to be sensitive to its ways of working. They are managers of their own time, flexible....

A just-in-time person may be appointed a manager and given a line responsibility, or used as an advisor....

A just-in-time person can work for several companies at the same time, exploiting his talents in a portfolio of projects... (pp. 132 -136)

Various members of the team are recruited and put under contract (Bancroft, 1988, pp. 33 - 34); first of all heads of department and the personnel described above, and then the *production co-ordinator*, who co-ordinates communication between departments, prepares schedules and progress reports as well as ordering equipment and co-ordinating transport; and the *production secretary*, who provides secretarial and administrative skills to the enterprise. All roles are cast and actors contracted. The *script supervisor/continuity person* times the script. Although *assistant directors* are not normally considered part of

the production office, falling, as they do, under the authority of the director, they operate in a demimonde between the artistic and organizational aspects of the temporary organization. The *first assistant director* forms the key link between the production office and the floor, where filming takes place. The first assistant ensures that every element necessary is present on the day in so far as the resources of the project allow, and must be knowledgeable about the script, locations, actors, sets, the schedule and how the director intends to shoot. The first controls the floor, standing by the camera, and has responsibility for issuing daily call sheets. The *second assistant director* arranges artists' calls and pick-ups, crowd doubles and stand-in calls; stunt calls; the copying and distribution of the first's call sheets; the approval and supervision of crowd payments; and bookings of unusual requests. The *third assistant director* assists the first, and is responsible for opening up in the morning, locking up at night, assisting artists throughout the shoot, and positioning crowds.

Don (1996) explained how units come together:

There are one or two individuals that start very early. There's myself [the location manager], the production manager, production designer, start collaborating on all the information, all the locations. The director then comes on board, we pass our information [to the director] and he starts making decisions, he will pass that back to the producer, pass his requests on, how he sees things, how things should go.... Costume designer comes on board. An art department comes on board to carry out the requirements of the production designer. The lighting cameraman starts, who will liaise with his gaffer sparks, who will employ a team of sparks to work on the show to carry out his lighting requests. Art department leads to construction being employed, a prop master is employed. He will employ a team of prop boys to carry out anything that the art department require. It's a chain.... You know when someone's coming on board. You know roughly when he's going to want answers from you. It's a well-oiled machine. Each department knows as and when things should begin to happen. (p. 37)

Ed, a production manager, networks to find suitable staff:

There aren't a great many names I have of technicians that I haven't actually worked with or met face-to-face.... You find one entry point and that person gives you three contacts and each of the three give you another two contacts and that's really the only way you can do it, you phone the people you trust and they tell you who to phone from there, and you just hope that it's going to be all right. (1997, p. 10)

Ed continued,

If you can sell a deal to a crew member and if, at the end of the shoot, that crew member has given you and gotten from you what you agreed in the first place, the next time you have that conversation, it's half the problem.... If you can bring those people happily forward to the new one [film unit], when you bring on strangers and they're grumbling on the lunch bus the first day, the people who know you will say, 'Well, actually I did such and such job with them, and it was OK. I can trust them.' And that's a huge advantage. (p. 11)

Ekstedt (2002) has characterised industries which combine temporary organizations with a contract-based workforce as having many self-employed professionals:

Participants need to have a good basic knowledge on which to rely, but that is not sufficient. The individual must also be renowned for keeping up with the competition in the market. The reputation is usually due to the fact that the individual has shown an extraordinary ability in some respect. To attain marketable knowledge is often connected with heavy investments costs in the form of extensive training in the 'hard school of life', yet the reward may be great. (p. 67)

This has a certain resonance with the UK film production sector, and with learning practices within units. Employment practices and experiential learning are explored in chapter five.

Having discussed hiring in terms of privilege, it is important to note that there can be significant negative aspects to working in film. According to Blair and Rainnie (1998),

The TUC in a recent report (TUC 1998) have used film production crews as examples of the new class of exploited casual workers. The report argues that contracts for production workers specify that the working day and working week would be inclusive of all overtime service, including travel, preparation and wrap time and also included specified extended days and bank holidays. Furthermore, production companies avoid paying freelance and contract workers for public holidays by declaring an unpaid break. There is no such thing as the typical contract, but the report argues that make up workers, for example, can guarantee that their contract will not include sick pay, holiday pay, pensions contributions or a guarantee that the fee will be paid on time. (p. 2)

Sue (1996) explained how artistic and practical decisions are made in pre-production:

People's contribution to the way it's done is in pre-production. The director, the production designer, the location manager, the director of photography, the costume designer, the make-up artist: they're all working very closely together and the way it's going to be done is discussed and bashed out and tried. It would not be cost-effective to change that for any other reason than you have bad weather...to actually change the approach once you're in the middle of it is not something that would be welcomed at all, because of the costing.... What you do in pre-production is to hammer it all out, to forge a plan, and try to stick to it. (p. 17)

For Sue, "The schedule is the basis of all discussion. Once everyone's got a script, an initial schedule is created and there are numerous drafts of this in the early days of pre-production" (p. 25). The final schedule and budget are prepared by the production manager and production accountant in consultation with the producer, director and heads of department. Insurance is arranged. A shooting schedule is drawn up describing, as Jim (1993) put it, "When we're going to shoot what." (p. 41) and story boards (the story in detailed pictorial form) are created if required. Jim said,

This [schedule] is what everybody works to. [It] will list the scenes we're going to shoot that day, the cast that are in those scenes, the props needed, the specific

costumes needed.... Everybody works to that, so they know in what order they've got to get things ready and what's going to be used on [which] day.... And if anything changes on the schedule and you have to re-issue it, you change the colour. We have a system of changing colour; you go to pink pages, to blue pages.... On [names a difficult film he worked on], we were into half tones! (p. 41)

Further production staff and cast are recruited and engaged. Studios and locations are selected and relevant permissions obtained. Sets, costumes and special effects are designed.

Linear descriptions of pre-production do not necessarily reflect practices in the field, particularly on low budget features. In the course of a day spent observing the penultimate day of pre-production on Anna Campion's film *Loaded* I noted:

At the start of Thursday, some artists had not yet signed and returned their contracts....Film stock had not been ordered. No New Zealand money had yet hit the production company's bank account. Essential technical equipment had not been contracted. Transportation arrangements for some of the unit (including all of the artists) were still to be finalised. The script was being changed. Exact crewing requirements for next week remained to be sorted out. Administrative details had yet to be worked out. Props were still being gathered. There were no firm arrangements to view rushes, which would be available from Tuesday the following week. Extras, required on the following Tuesday, were being interviewed on Thursday afternoon. (1993a, pp. 8 - 11)

Technical challenges can arise during any phase of production, but in this phase, unit members and suppliers particularly attempt to predict and address them. Garrett Brown, inventor of the steadicam (a camera mounted on a spring-loaded arm which is attached to frame strapped to the operator's body, making the camera effectively weightless and easy to move quickly and without using pre-laid track, giving shots a smooth, dynamic quality)

told of being approached by director Stanley Kubrick to provide a special effect for *The Shining* (1980):

[Kubrick] was very particular to find out could the lens be low, in what you would call low mode. And of course we said, 'Sure!' Then we went back to Los Angeles to figure out how to make the lens low. Something we used in a great deal of the film was the camera on the bottom and the rest of the steadicam on the top and the result of that is...once you've done it, the lens is now down by your knees, the lense is down in a [child's] eye-view height. There were certain things that we did that caused a grunt of Stanley satisfaction, you could tell that he was quite pleased. The little boy on the bike was very pleasing to Stanley. Double grunt of satisfaction on that one. (Joyce, 1996)

There is a pre-production meeting involving the producer, director, production manager and all heads of department to discuss each individual's and each department's responsibilities with regard to realising the particular script. Don explained, "You've got the main schedule which is put together by a production manager and the first assistant and then whipped up and i's dotted and t's crossed in a production meeting just prior to filming." (1996, p. 37). Set construction begins, and costumes are ordered. Publicity is discussed.

3.8.5 PRODUCTION

The workload is intense. The hours are intense. What you have to get out in that one day is heavily pressurised. It's not for the weak-willed. (Pam, 1996, p. 30)

The entire unit (i.e. cast and crew) assembles and principal photography commences. Most features are filmed on 35mm stock. There is also Super 35mm, known as Cinemascope. Low budget features shot on film tend to use 16mm or Super 16mm, which is blown up to 35mm during post-production.

Since the late 1990s commercial features have increasingly been shot on video, of which there are a variety of formats. *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), shot on Hi-8, a low level video format, was one well known example which grossed over \$200m (*Digital Filmmaking Secrets!*, n.d.). Star Wars Producer George Lucas said at the 2001 National Association of Broadcasters show, “I will never make another film - on film – again.” (Carus, 2003, p. 1). *My Little Eye* (2002), a British prototype, was shot on mini DV. In June 2002,

The Big Seven studios (Disney, 20th Century Fox, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Universal Studios and Warner Brothers) formed an initiative to oversee technical standards as “d-cinema” evolves from the fantasy format of the few to the first choice for mainstream movies.

(Carus, 2003, p. 1)

Films are often transferred to video at the end of the production process for the delivery of masters to foreign territories. In any case, most filmed material is now transferred to video during the editing process.

During principal photography, information is circulated through the unit through the mechanism of call sheets, which are sourced from the schedule described above. The first assistant director issues these daily memos, which include information such as the date, the time the unit is called (to start), the time breakfast is available from, what is to be shot - the location(s) - and which scene(s), which artist(s) are required for which scenes and their pick-up time(s), what individual departments are supposed to do on that day, and so forth (Jim, 1993). Bob said, “If there are any messages I wanted to give to everybody without seeing them [personally], I put [those] at the end of the call sheet.... Everybody makes sure they get a call sheet, so they can’t turn around and say, ‘I didn’t see that!’” (1997, p. 21). In discussing the power of gossip in units, Bob told me, “You can turn it [a rumour] ‘round and do a little joke on the call sheet on the previous day’s rumour.” (p. 22). Pam talked about further documentation the production office is responsible for producing during principal photography:

On a daily basis you have the progress report which is all the information from the previous day's work goes into that, the number of minutes shot, the number of scenes completed, not completed, catering figures, the artists that were called, the times they were called. All that kind of stuff. And the stock used, etcetera. If you're going abroad, the shipping lists, which are vital.... The movement orders.... Information about the country you're going to, and the hotels... (1996, p. 25)

During a second day spent with the *Loaded* unit, this time observing principal photography, my fieldwork notes highlighted the extreme labour specialisation within units:

Each person's work is so specialised that individuals or work-groups (i.e. camera people or sound people or electricians) only work in bursts, whether their contribution is acting, setting up the track or loading the camera. The nature of work on a film unit tends to be such that when one person or work-group is doing their thing, everyone else on the set is standing around waiting for it to be done and watching while it is done. In a sense, everyone in the unit is performing his job in front of an audience. There are moments when some of the cast and crew do actually work together (or at least simultaneously) - during a take, for example. Far more time is spent in waiting for someone else to do his bit so that you can do yours. (1993b, pp. 8 - 9)

Negatives (if film was used) and DAT (digitally recorded sound) are couriered to labs at the close of each day. Rushes (processed film) are converted to video format (unless principal photography was on video) and digitised into Avid, the most popular non-linear (digital) film editing system. Rushes are viewed daily by the producer, director, editor and the director of photography, and the editor begins rushes assembly, i.e. cutting the rushes together to make a rough edit. As reported above, progress reports and cost reports are prepared daily for financiers. The production phase ends with the completion of principal photography. At this point the cast and crew are no longer required. The unit shrinks dramatically.

Production is an extremely pressured time. William Goldman (1983) describes the demands on director Richard Attenborough filming on location during *A Bridge Too Far* (1977):

The pressure of cost was never as heavy on Attenborough as during the Million Dollar Hour....

October 3 was to be Redford's last Sunday [the final Sunday in a series when Nijmegen Bridge in Holland could be closed for an hour of filming]. Which meant that if the weather made shooting impossible, we could not duplicate the conditions until the following Sunday, *if* the good people of Nijmegen could be talked into letting us have the bridge an extra hour a week down the line.

Redford was actually contracted to work till Wednesday; he was getting out ahead of schedule. So, since we needed this sequence, if the weather stopped us again, Redford would have to stay over the extra days, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, until we could shoot again the following Sunday.

There is a word in the movie business and it is called 'overage.' It refers to what you pay an artist if you go beyond the boundaries of his contract. (People are hired for specific lengths of time, and if you need them for longer, assuming they are available, you have to pay them for it, usually a percentage of their weekly salary.)

Well, considering Redford's weekly salary, his overage would come to \$125,000. That's per day. Multiply that by four, and keeping him till next Sunday means half a million dollars. That's just for him.

This is also the end of the giant part of the production. There were three days left, but they were basically two scenes involving Dirk Bogarde. The movie was due to finish Wednesday. That was the final day of shooting. Everyone was paid only until then.

There were 275 people working that morning. And if we couldn't shoot, it meant that all of them would get extra salary (and meals and lodging and whatever else you can think of) to wait around to shoot the following Sunday.

If we could get the bridge the following Sunday. (The feeling was we couldn't.) And *if* the weather, which was bad and getting worse, would be shootable a week down the line. (The guess was that it probably would not be.) So when this was called the Million Dollar Hour, that's speaking conservatively. (pp. 289 - 290)

A serious mistake or a delay during production can ultimately lead to overages and to the kinds of problems Goldman suggests: locations which become unavailable and cast with contractual engagements elsewhere.

3.8.6 POST-PRODUCTION

The unit downsizes after principal photography, shrinking to the producer, director, editor, director of photography and various members of the production office staff, such as the co-ordinator and the secretary. Bob talked about his experience of post-production: "Everybody goes, basically, and there's just me [the production manager], or the production person, the producer, accountant, co-ordinator for a bit, and that's it. And the editors. But they've been involved, they're a separate little group." (1997, p. 22). A specialist post-production co-ordinator often takes over from the production co-ordinator at this point. Rushes are viewed by the editor, director, producer, and director of photography. Extra shots may be required and further photography organised, as with *The Crying Game*. Selected slates are edited on secondary material using a marked up shooting script as a guide to make a first assembly. This is fine tuned to produce a fine cut appraisal, and the picture is *locked off*, agreed by those concerned to be complete and satisfactory. The original visual material is cut together by a specialist using an *EDL*, edit decision list, to produce a mute answer print, the filmed or taped visual material without sound, a process which takes around two weeks. This goes back to the lab, awaiting final visual and sound elements. Titles and *opticals* (special visual effects such as slowing up a scene or reversing action) are created at the same time that sound is finalised, with *ADR* (automatic dialogue recording - dialogue replacement) being added as required, music and atmosphere tracks being recorded or licensed and *Foley* (sound) effects (footsteps, heavy

breathing, thunder and so forth) added. These elements are combined in a *first answer print*, the first print combining picture and sound submitted by the lab for customer approval. Depending on how the producer, director and financiers feel, there can be generations of answer prints, i.e. a second, third and so on, as further alterations are required and implemented. When a version is agreed, a showprint (the template for release prints) is produced, and as many release prints as required. Several versions of video masters are also produced including NTSC format (for the Americas).

During the post-production phase, the work of the unit is more or less outplaced, with various external technical experts providing (in the main) services and working under the technical and artistic direction of internal experts such as the director and director of photography. Once the film is completed and delivered to the financiers, only the producer remains to wind up the company's active life.

Arrangements for distribution, which are outside the scope of this study, are just as important as the production phase which brings a film into existence. Inadequate or unsuitable distribution can bring about the artistic or financial failure of a perfectly good feature.

3.9 WORKING IN A FILM UNIT

The chemistry of a unit, this bizarre circus that you take around town, is such an accident. You make up this broth, and something crawls out onto the beach, and you don't know how many legs it's going to have! (Ed, 1997, p. 8)

Film units closely match Handy's (1983) description of task culture in *Gods of Management: The Changing Work of Organisations*, although the examples he uses, for example the product groups of marketing departments or the account executives of advertising agencies, assume that task cultures exist as cultural sub-sets within large, ongoing organisations:

The whole emphasis of the task culture is on getting the job done. To this end the culture seeks to bring together the appropriate resources, the right people at the right level of the organisation, and to let them get on with it. Influence is based more on expert power than on position or personal power, although these sources have their effect. Influence is also more widely dispersed than in other cultures, and each individual tends to think he has more of it. It is a team culture, where the outcome, the result, the product, of the team's work tends to be the common enemy obliterating individual objectives and most status and style differences. The task culture utilises the unifying power of the group to improve efficiency and to identify the individual with the objective of the organisation.

This culture is extremely adaptable. Groups, project teams, or task forces are formed for a specific purpose and can be reformed, abandoned or continued....

The task culture therefore thrives where speed of reaction, integration, sensitivity and creativity are more important than depth of specialisation....

The task culture is the one preferred, as a personal choice to work in, by most managers, certainly at the middle and junior levels. It is the culture which most of the behavioural theories of organizations point towards with its emphasis on groups, expert power, rewards for results, merging individual and group objectives. It is the culture most in tune with current ideologies of change and adaptation, individual freedom and low status differentials. (pp. 181-183)

Producer Ann described the powerful attraction of working in temporary organizations such as film units:

It's about working in groups that...take the best of people's forces and move them together as one. It's facilitating one person's vision, but as a group. It's a most extraordinary thing, for an idea to reside with one person and then be made to happen by a group.... And the pleasure from that.... There is a great addiction to being part of the group, being part of the family, being pulled into something. That's the addictive nature of it. And when productions stop, there's a huge depression. (1996, p. 52)

Working in a unit is a highly organised and structured experience. Julie Salamon (1991), writing in *The Devil's Candy: The Bonfire of the Vanities Goes to Hollywood*, said:

Despite the apparent casualness of the troops - the shagginess and the sneakers - the film world was as rigidly hierarchical as the military. Richard Sylbert [production designer and briefly Paramount's head of production (*Yahoo! Movies: Richard Sylbert – biography*, n.d.)] had been right when he'd said that movie-making was like war. The perfect war, in fact. There were uniforms and regiments and communications on walkie-talkies in code, middle-of-the-night manoeuvres under grim conditions, and an overwhelming sense of mission. But all that got shot was film. (p. 113)

Ann too used a military metaphor to describe the intensely hierarchical structures underlying a veneer of informality in units:

It's sometimes a bit like the army, there has to be this discipline, in a crisis everyone must be able to pull together in a certain way and not go to pieces. There is an awareness of instilling confidence in people so that within a crisis everyone can function normally and not just fall apart.... It's sort of informal, but it's very formal. People coming into it new can often find the distinctions quite false-footing in that they feel that there's a very free-flowing atmosphere which has its own rigidity too and there are certain things that some people can do and other people can't. Is that odd? It's a terribly difficult one to enter and know how far you can go; the young ones are constantly ending up in a position of overstepping or being seen to, or just not knowing where to stop, I suppose. I was always told that too, when I first started. I assumed this free-for-all business was completely open and I remember working on a picture in Ireland and being told by the director not to be so familiar with him in front of the crew. And I was line producing this! So, aghast by it, but I realised that was part of [working on a unit]....

There are hidden demarcations and there are things which constantly cry *give me respect*. (1996, pp. 51 - 52)

There are universally acknowledged top dogs within units:

Everybody is servicing the camera department, everybody is servicing the camera to keep turning over....

If you're talking about typical hierarchy, the director and the camera crew, they're the gods, and everybody else is minions. That happens quite a lot. But you try not to let it. (Bob, 1997, pp. 13 - 14)

I encountered the importance of position within units at first hand, while observing during the principal photography of *Loaded*. My field notes record:

I was surprised that greater attempts were not made to make the waiting time more bearable - a stack of folding chairs or stools for those who wanted to sit would have been a basic improvement. The appearance of three folding chairs spoke volumes about the hierarchy which seems to operate within the unit (and, by extension, within the industry). There were a couple of other incidents, too, such as Anna [the director] asking to have a roll up made. (1993b, p. 9)

In chapter two, Garratt's (1987) model of the learning organization stressed the importance of hierarchy as an element of the learning organization, as did Leonard's Chaparral case study (1992).

Daskalaki and Blair (2002) have discussed the highly structured nature of film making:

The hierarchical organising of film production.... is reinforced by a large number of commonly held assumptions and rules which are instilled in junior members of staff as they work their way through the grades, and based upon skill levels, length of attachment to a group [semi-permanent work group] and task allocation. (p. 19)

They note that this is at odds with much of the prescriptive literature on managing creativity. My own fieldwork experience indicates that creativity within units is considered to be principally the creativity of the few, usually the writer, director and producer, although others certainly sway and shade particular decisions that fall within their areas of influence and expertise, as chapter five will demonstrate.

When asked if unit personnel compare the performances of various units, Ann said:

I never quite know whether people see themselves as bonded unit in that way, because they're not distinct. You get such a cross-over, various films share the same personnel. You don't have that sense, 'Only this film unit could have done that.' Every now and then there is an effort to repeat a crew in toto. That was done once by Working Title. When they made *My Beautiful Laundrette*, they tried to repeat an identical crew on *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, and it was not happy.

It was still the same director, but everybody had changed and moved on and the material was quite different. I thought it was mad, because the expectation level is always difficult.... The whole thing was cemented into previous relationships that weren't necessarily appropriate. (1996, pp. 18 -19)

3.9.1 CAREER PROGRESSION IN FILM PRODUCTION

There is a significant aspirational element involved in working in feature film production. Most people who freelance in production are working their way up from the bottom of unit structure. Everyone expects or hopes that on their next production they will be hired upwards to do a job with a more prestigious title, more responsibility and more money. On any given production, many people working on the unit are doing their current job and learning through participant observation about the position they aspire to. Huw said, "I had a focus puller who was marvellous. I did eight films with him, and I could see that he wanted to move on, so I encouraged him, I said, 'Just do it. Go and do it.' And he's doing very well. There are quite a lot of cameramen now who used to be my assistants. Which is nice." (1996, p. 5). Promotion within a given unit is rare (because of the very short contracts), and when it does occur, it is an indication that someone has quit, been sacked or fallen ill. Advancement more usually depends on persuading whoever is recruiting staff for a unit that is being formed that one has sufficient knowledge and experience to be made up to the next level. This system creates hyper-awareness of the performance of others in the unit: on the one hand, freelancers are focused on learning a new job while doing the current one; and on the other, they know the jobs of those below them in the

hierarchy inside out, having done those jobs themselves at one time or another.

Employment practices are examined in detail in chapter five.

3.10 UK GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING AND MANAGEMENT IN FEATURE FILM UNITS

A Bigger Picture: The report of the Film Policy Review Group (1998) was the product of a policy review commissioned by Chris Smith, then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, as a collaboration between industry and government to reinvigorate the British film industry. It continues to be the basis for government policy on film in 2003. In 1997 Smith set out six objectives for the industry:

A doubling of the domestic market share of British films; a larger and more diverse audience for film in general and cinema in particular; training provision that fully meets the industry needs; a financial framework that facilitates and encourages sustained investment in the British film industry; export performance that reflects British films' full potential; and continued success in attracting valuable inward investment. (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1998, p. 3)

The brief of the *Review Group* was to draw up an action plan for the industry based on these objectives. It did so through the agency of a number of *Film Review Sub-groups*:

- Film Finance
- Achieving, 20% Market Share
- Broadening the Audience
- Inward Investment
- Export
- Training and Education.

Duncan Kenworthy (producer, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, Eric Fellner (joint executive producer, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*), Tim Bevan (joint executive producer, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*), Nik Powell (executive producer, *The Crying Game*), and Jane Frazer (joint production executive, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*) served on sub-groups. Kenworthy was also a member of the *Review Group*.

Although the co-chairs of the *Review Group*, Tom Clarke CBE MP (formerly an executive in the film industry, a Minister of State, DNH/DCMS (Film) 1997 - 1998, and a Member of the British Film Institute) and Stewart Till CBE (Deputy Chair of the Film Council and Deputy Chair of Skillset, also President of Signpost Films, former Polygram Chief - Polygram was the parent company of Working Title Films, which made *Four Weddings and a Funeral* - , and a producer) commented that the report represents “the views of people who have brought Britain’s film industry to a state of health it has not known for many years” (p. 1), the report underlines fundamental structural differences between the USA and UK industries, and problems inherent in the UK model:

The US industry is dominated by *distribution-led, integrated structures*, where the processes of development, production and distribution are financed and carried out by a single company. Such firms can use the revenues from distribution to finance production; they have the critical mass to attract finance; they are thus able to make big budget films, write off failures and build up a library of rights.

By contrast, the UK industry is *production-led and fragmented*. The production process is separate from the distribution process which is dominated by big US companies. Production remains a ‘cottage industry’: most producers have no close relationship with a distributor, cannot easily reduce risk or raise finance by developing a slate of films, and have to sell their rights in order to get their films distributed....

Typically they [British producers] are less able to produce larger-budget films; they under-invest in research and development; and their marketing budgets are too small to have an impact. These weaknesses are magnified by the dominance of the US distributors in our market. They have a plentiful supply of their own movies and so have little incentive to promote relatively risky and low-budget British productions. (DCMS, 1998, pp. 3 - 4)

The elements of strategy set out to tackle these problems which are of special relevance to learning and management are: “the structure of the industry: we need to encourage the emergence of a distribution led industrial process: better capitalised companies which can

integrate production with distribution” and “**the workforce: we need to ensure an adequate supply of appropriately skilled people. This will require a sustained increase in investment in training to deliver an improved strategy focusing on key areas.**” (DCMS, 1998, p. 4).

In terms of structure, the government has been attempting to establish mini-studios since 1997, when it set up a lottery franchise scheme worth more than £90m over six years. Amidst a great deal of industry friction, thirty-seven applicants tendered for the four lottery-funded franchises which were on offer. Three were successful: Pathé (£33.1m), DNA (£29m, Duncan Kenworthy being one of the principles) and Film Consortium (£33.55m, involving Nik Powell and Stephen Woolley). Journalist Geoffrey Macnab (2002) quoted one “leading film financier” as commenting, “Sadly, the selection process has been highly divisive, with producers, distributors and financiers feeling angry and excluded.” (p. 12). Mick Southworth, formerly head of FilmFour Distribution, said, “You might just as well take £100m and set fire to the fucking lot.” (Macnab, 2002, p. 12).

Charles Denton, then head of the Arts Council’s advisory panel on film, predicted that “the three winners would make 90 features, with total budgets of £460m over the six-year period of their franchises.” (Macnab, 2002, p. 12). In the event, thirty-six films have been delivered, the most commercially successful to date being *An Ideal Husband* and *Hideous Kinky*, both released in 1999. Neither was classified as a purely UK film by the BFI, *An Ideal Husband* appearing under the ‘US/UK Co-productions’ heading, and *Hideous Kinky* listed under ‘Other UK Co-productions’. *An Ideal Husband* grossed £2,891,515 in the UK and \$18,542,974 in the US, while *Hideous Kinky* achieved £686,428 in the UK and \$1,368,627 in the US. The top grossing UK film in the UK for 1999 was FilmFour’s *East is East*. With a UK gross of £7,251,243, it achieved 250% of *An Ideal Husband*’s gross, and more than 10 times what *Hideous Kinky* grossed in the UK - without lottery subsidy (British Film Institute, n.d.). “What nobody took into account was how long it takes to build up a production operation,” says Andrea Calderwood, ex-head of production at Pathé Pictures. “None of the franchisees acknowledged how long it takes to go from idea

to screen. They all should have said they might not make anything for the first two years...the way the applications were set out, there was an expectation of immediate activity.” (Macnab, 2002, pp. 12 -13).

During the six year franchise period, Polygram, the distributor with which DNA was associated, was sold and dis-aggregated; and Rank, with which Film Consortium has a distribution deal, was taken over by Carlton. The most positive outcome of the scheme is that all three franchise winners, the *triplets* (Macnab, 2002, p. 13) are predicted to survive without continuing lottery input, although DNA is in talks with Fox, “a considerable irony given that the franchises were supposed to stand up to Hollywood studios, not to go into partnership with them.” (Macnab, p. 13). Although the Film Council has no plans to extend the franchise scheme, it has established three new lottery-sourced funds with budgets totalling £20m.

The *Review Group* seem to have discussed workforce learning only in reference to technical training, highlighting the need to produce and maintain a flexible, up-to-date formally qualified pool of labour able to operate at the cutting edge of new technologies. Although film making is referred to as an industrial process, film units, the sites of fabrication, are not considered. Other than referring to the need for producers to receive training in “commercial management skills” (DCMS, 1998, p. 25), management within the industry is hardly referred to.

In terms of “maintaining a world class workforce” (DCMS, 1998, p. 5), the report recommends a new Skills Investment Fund. Contribution would be a condition of grant for all publicly subsidised films and for those films seeking to qualify as wholly British or as British co-productions. The total budget called for to train the workforce, an additional £5.3m per annum, would be raised through the Skills Investment Fund (pp. 27 - 28). The report also calls for a fund of £20m to address distribution (£10m), development (£5m), generic marketing (£3m), and training for “those involved in the creation, production and distribution of British films (£2m) (p. 48). This would be “achieved with a [voluntary]

contribution of just 0.5% of film-related revenues from the exhibition, theatrical distribution, video and broadcasting sectors, together with Lottery support” (p. 47). Of the total £25.3 million new investment called for, 21% is earmarked for training.

The report calls for Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for Broadcast, Film, Video and Interactive Media and designated National Training Organization (NTO), to develop a new training strategy “to encourage more commercially-focused films, to maintain high production values, and to promote standards and qualifications (DCMS, 1998, p. 5). Skillset is owned and managed by the industry, including: The BBC, Channel 4, Channel 5, Discovery, The Independent Television Association, The Producers’ Alliance for Cinema and Television, The International Visual Communication Association, The Federation of Entertainment Unions, The Film Council, The Motion Picture Association and The Commercial Radio Companies Association (*Skillset*, n.d.).

The *Review* identified the following occupational groups as being particularly in need of training: scriptwriters, script editors, development executives, producers, production accountants, distributors and talent (performers). It emphasised the importance of maintaining production values: “Research conducted for the group suggested that an extra 200 [training] places a year are required to meet the increased demand for technical crews if the UK is to retain the ability to crew films to the required standard and at an acceptable cost. There is also a growing need for re-training in new technologies, to update skills to keep pace with new developments.” (DCMS, 1998, pp. 25 -26).

In 1998, Skillset updated its 1993 report on freelance employment and training needs, which had surveyed two thousand two hundred freelancers. Four hundred and forty-seven respondents participated in the updating study, which was undertaken by Varlaam and Walker (1998). They reported that:

- Freelance contract work of unspecified length had increased from 20% to 40% of the sector;
- 18% of respondents were out of work, a similar proportion to 1994;

- 15% of respondents moved from one sector/area of work to another, with 50% of researchers/writers moving into production/post production;
- Around 20% of respondents had undertaken training during the previous 12 months;
- “Respondents who worked in production, post-production and art dept/props were more likely than others to have training needs (73% vs. 54%).” (p. 2);
- Of the 64% of respondents who said they had training needs to address within 12 months, 70% said their needs were, “to keep up-to-date/improve current work”, 57% “to develop computer skills” and 41% “to move on in career.” (p. 2);
- “Over 50% of respondents with training needs were prepared to spend up to 5% of their income on training” (p. 2);
- Of the over 60% of respondents who had tried to arrange training, 47% found that fees were too high, 37% had difficulty assessing which courses were relevant, and 34% said it was difficult to take time off work;
- By 1998, the unavailability of suitable courses was cited as a major difficulty by 33% of respondents as opposed to 14% in 1993.

The respondents who identified themselves as having the greatest training needs worked in film units. It is notable that management training is not mentioned in this report and that the format of training is assumed always to be a short course undertaken away from the unit and 100% self-financed by a freelance contract worker.

By 2000, the government had established the Film Council. In the foreword to *Towards a Sustainable UK Film Industry*, the first public statement of the Film Council’s overall industrial and cultural aims and objectives, chairman Sir Alan Parker CBE, Academy Award winning director, writer and producer, (“Alan Parker: Pioneer of UK Cinema”, 2001) outlined its role: “[to] identify the endemic problems that plague our industry and to start to develop a set of policies which over time can create a framework for sustained success.... The educational and cultural role of the Film Council has been largely delegated to the British Film Institute and its regional partners.... We focus here mainly on the commercial film industry.” (UK Film Council, 2003). He said, “At the dawn of a brave,

new world of bewildering technological change, without government support (direct aid) and public (Lottery) funding, the film industry in the UK would most certainly collapse.” (*Film Council*). The Council put forward a two stage plan of action to strengthen the industry. The first stage was concerned with the reorganisation and reallocation of public funds. Out of a slate of initiatives announced in 2000, totalling expenditure of £54.2m, just £1m, less than 2% of the total, was identified for training to “support a massive expansion in training for scriptwriters and development executives, and a tightly targeted programme to train business executives, producers and distributors operating in the international markets.” (*Film Council*). However, the main aim of the Council’s Training Fund is to “work with partners to maintain and develop the skills base of the film industry” (*Film Council*).

Parker said, “Stage two is a longer-term undertaking aimed at generating change within the industry at a structural level in order to create a truly durable business sector.” (*Film Council*, 2003). The Council’s second wave of initiatives will: establish more favourable conditions to encourage the creation of integrated British film companies; increase access to venture capital and private equity in order to address key structural problems facing the industry; and exploit the potential of new technologies.

There is no direct mention of film units in the executive summary of the Council’s policies: they are merely hinted at in mentions of financing projects and adapting to technological advances.

There seems to be fundamental tacit agreement between government, funders, larger producers, independents and freelances in the UK that feature film production units work well. Almost invisible, temporary units are not discussed or theorised about: they are taken for granted as the mechanism for manufacturing features.

3.11 CONCLUSIONS: THE UK FEATURE FILM PRODUCTION INDUSTRY

Film production in the UK continues to be dependent on USA finance, as it always has been. There is no real political or industrial will to challenge this state of affairs, and even if there were, it is unlikely that the UK alone could mount an adequate challenge to the USA's hegemonic position of dominance in the west, particularly with regard to distribution.

Although the industry and the government are deeply concerned about various aspects of feature film production, there is a general unstated consensus that the way in which feature films are fabricated in the UK at present is satisfactory. In just over one hundred years of production, and despite successive waves of technological revolution, the process of making films has become well established as highly routinised and fundamentally hierarchical. The structure of the manufacturing process through the agency of temporary organizations is taken for granted, because everyone involved developed within that particular set of circumstances.

On those rare occasions when management of the production process is considered, it is not in terms of features of the learning organization models discussed in chapter two, but rather from an instrumental point of view. There is no top-down interest in learning about anything perceived as either increasing production costs or lowering productivity - health and safety issues, for example. There is broad agreement that training is essential to maintain and develop various technical skills, especially (at present) those relating to digital technology. The earlier discussion of digital technology in this chapter was included as an indication of the level of technological change the industry faces.

Even though the Film Council is calling for UK films to be made within mini-studio settings so that production companies can have slates of films in development, production and distribution simultaneously, thus spreading risk, the only successful mini-major still operating in the UK, Working Title, continues to make features in exactly the same way as

any independent British producer making a one-off film: in temporary units staffed with freelance contract workers. There is no reason to believe that any new studios that may be established would take a different view of the production process, and certainly there is no suggestion that the recent Lottery triplets adopted different production practices within their franchises. In an industry which has grown increasingly insecure over the past decade, with more people than ever working on uncertain short-term contracts, addressing aspects of the industry which are delivering effectively is not a priority. Certainly no one else is asking how temporary organizations such as film units learn.

The UK industry understands that in order to succeed, indeed to continue to exist domestically and internationally, learning is vital. It has identified a series of infinite and vertical learning curves. The major issues recognised within the industry are: technology, development, distribution, marketing, and inward investment. Technology in particular is seen as being capable of giving the UK industry a competitive advantage in the international marketplace. The industry is looking abroad for models of good practice, and to technology to lower costs and shorten time-to-market. There is a deep interest in creativity, which I have suggested is conceptualised within the industry as the creativity of the few: producer, director, writer; rather than of everyone who participates in the process of manufacture.

Nevertheless, temporary film units are arenas for experimentation and learning. Every script presents unique opportunities and challenges. Each temporary unit is a *greenfield site* - an organization created from scratch with specially recruited staff. Film units function as integrated systems. Every employee is technically capable and interested in learning, at least in his or her own specialist area. Moreover, the whole organization is designed around the creation and control of knowledge, although people in units are more likely to speak of problem solving than IPRs (intellectual property rights). The same definition that Leonard applied to learning laboratories, “complex organizational ecosystems that integrate problem solving, internal knowledge, innovation and

experimentation, and external information,” (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 23) is true of film units, albeit in different ways.

Success in a highly competitive, rapidly changing and volatile marketplace is a hallmark of learning organizations. It follows, then, that on the evidence considered here, UK film production units that made successful films should have been learning organizations. While it is certain that film units are sites for learning, whether or not they are *learning organizations* is considered in chapter six.

Chapter four discusses two embedded UK case studies of temporary units: *The Crying Game* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Chapter five examines six themes in function of fieldwork data: three that emerged from learning organization theory, and three that emerged from interviews with a range of freelance managers with extensive experience of working for temporary units on a contract basis.

CHAPTER FOUR

TWO UK PRODUCTION CASE STUDIES: *THE CRYING GAME* AND *FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is intended to illuminate the technical descriptions of production in chapter three with examples drawn from two UK film units: *The Crying Game* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. It provides a context within which chapter five's discussion of six important themes can be considered. The primary material here is drawn from extended interviews with freelance unit managers, which were audio taped and fully transcribed.

As discussed in chapter one, each of the two film production units considered here is an intermediary sub-unit in an embedded single-case design. Individuals who participated in this study are the smallest sub-units. All of the sub-units, whether individuals or intermediary sub-units, are embedded in the UK feature film production industry which has been selected as the overall unit of analysis in an embedded single-case design to consider how temporary organizations such as film units learn (Yin, 1984, Ch. 2).

This chapter draws together my data on two particular units with supplementary secondary material to explore the production aspect of each feature in so far as possible, and to consider how temporary organizations such as film units learn.

Participants Don, Sue, Tim and Huw were part of *The Crying Game*'s unit, while Kay and Pam worked on *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, and Don had nearly been involved.

Participants' abilities to discuss what actually happened during production on either *The Crying Game* unit or the *Four Weddings and a Funeral* unit were severely limited. As Sue said during an interview in 1996, five years after her case study unit had been wound up,

"The Crying Game was a very long time ago." (p. 37). Perhaps because freelances work in so many units over the course of their careers, and in such rapid succession, usually without any reflective practice, experiences meld or get overwritten. Some participants were able to offer broad brush-stroke impressions of their time on one or the other of the case study units, particularly in relation to incidents in which they had been directly involved. Others couldn't recall as much as that.

More crucially, I became intrigued by the way that these respondents dismissed working within any one unit as a relatively unimportant episode in their working lives, insisting on the primacy of working in a series of temporary organizations and on the significance of networks instead. As chapter one explained, these factors changed the direction, nature and emphasis of this study.

4.2 *THE CRYING GAME* (1992)

'The Crying Game is one of the year's best movies. And the very qualities that make it so engaging and surprising would have kept it from being produced by any American studio. This movie refuses to play by conventional rules; it's fresh, funny, tragic and gloriously unpredictable...The narrative takes daring and unexpected turns that leave your head spinning and cause you to re-evaluate everything you've seen - Jordan starts detonating genre expectations...Just when you think you know where *The Crying Game* is going, it delights you by going someplace else...This is a movie about overturning preconceptions - about people and about movies.' (*The Orange County Register's* review, 24 November 1992). (Giles, 1997, p.48)

In 1997 Jane Giles, Head of Distribution at the British Film Institute, published a detailed monograph of *The Crying Game*, from which I have summarised the history of its production, distribution and exhibition.

The story of *The Crying Game*'s production, from script development to distribution to exhibition has been for me a salutary example, 'a tribute to the endless persuasive powers of Mr. Woolley...and the endless creative powers of Mr. Jordan',¹ but one that also demonstrates William Goldman's film industry maxim: 'Nobody knows anything.'² (Giles, 1997, p. 8)

Giles summarise the plot of the film as follows:

A black British soldier named Jody is lured away from an Armagh fairground by an Irish woman, Jude, and then suddenly kidnapped by the IRA. Held hostage in a glasshouse²⁵ while the IRA try to negotiate with the RUC for an exchange of prisoners, Jody befriends one of his captors, Fergus. Jody shows Fergus a photograph of his beautiful wife, Dil, and asks him to look out for her should anything happen to him. Fergus is instructed by his boss Maguire to execute Jody, but finds himself unable to shoot his escaping prisoner in the back. Jody is hit by a British tank as troops arrive to storm the glasshouse.

Fergus escapes to London where he takes a job as a labourer on a site overlooking a cricket pitch. Remembering his promise to Jody, he discovers Dil working as a hairdresser at Millies [*sic*] salon in Spitalfields. She cuts his hair, and guesses that Fergus is Scottish. Fergus follows Dil to the Metro, a club presided over by Col, the genial bartender. Fergus tells Dil that his name is Jimmy. He saves her from a troublesome boyfriend, Dave. Gently haunted by Jody's memory, the couple begin a tenuous romance, but when they eventually make love Fergus is horrified to abruptly discover that Dil is in fact a male transvestite.

Fergus lashes out at Dil and runs away. At first she refuses his apologies, but Dil later visits Fergus at work and their relationship is tentatively (although not sexually) resumed. Jude and Maguire catch up with Fergus to inform him that in his absence he has been court-martialled by the IRA and sentenced to the suicide mission of assassinating a British judge. They tighten the screws on him by threatening to involve Dil. Fergus tries to protect Dil from Jude and Maguire by cutting her hair and disguising her in Jody's old cricketing whites. But, drunk and

distraught, Dil refuses to stay hidden. Fergus admits to her that he knew Jody. As Fergus sleeps, Dil ties him up and holds him at gun point causing him to miss his appointment with death. Instead, Maguire is killed during the assassination. Jude catches up with Fergus but is shot dead by Dil who then turns the gun on herself. Fergus saves Dil by telling her to go to the Metro while he prepares to take the rap for the murder of Jude. Why? Because it's in his nature. Dil stands by her man, visiting Fergus in prison with only two thousand three hundred and thirty-five days left to go. (Giles, 1997, pp. 25-27)

The Crying Game, released in 1992, was made by Palace Pictures, a company owned by producer Steve Woolley, who also owned the Scala Cinema in Kings Cross. Palace started life as a video distributor, cashing in on the boom in home entertainment, before getting involved in film distribution and production. Woolley persuaded writer/director Neil Jordan, with whom he had worked on previous films, to write, in ten days, a script based on a concept Jordan had been considering for a decade, in order to raise finance at the 1991 Cannes' Film Festival. The controversial themes of Jordan's script, including cross-dressing, homosexuality, mixed-race relationships and the violent politics of Northern Ireland frightened off potential investors such as Miramax, Sony and CiBy. Production co-ordinator Sue had doubts about the script:

I nearly turned it down. I had problems, when I read the script, with the morality of it. I had a hard time accepting that the hero of the film was an IRA terrorist.

That's not really the point of the film but I seriously thought at the time, do I want to do this?... However, I knew Neil Jordan and Steve Woolley and I really didn't think that's where they were at, so I did it anyway. (1996, p. 37)

Tim said, "Scala, or Palace (as it was) are risk takers and they're brave. Sometimes it pays off." (1996, p. 20).

The film's £2.3 million budget was ultimately financed by a range of sources, including Eurotrustees, a consortium of UK, Spanish, French, German and Italian distributors which had been set up in 1990 in response to Hollywood's domination of European markets;

Japanese distribution company Nippon Development & Finance; British Screen Finance; and Channel 4, which eventually contributed the largest single amount, having funded previous Palace productions during the 1980s. This was not actually enough to cover costs, and the film - working title *The Soldier's Wife* - was made by relying on partially deferred salaries: if the film had not gone into profit, no one involved in its production would have received full payment. Davis (2000) notes that profit sharing was "utilized in the professional English theatre since the Renaissance" but "by the nineteenth century...it was usually the last resort of a company whose insolvent manager had collapsed." (p. 252), and this is not entirely dissimilar to the situation during the filming of *The Crying Game*. Palace:

...had to meet an early November (1991) start date to secure the above- and below-the-line deferrals that would make the budget work. Two other Palace Pictures films were also...in production (*Waterland* and *Dust Devil*) and the company was in the throes of an aggressive audit. Foundering financially, Palace was unable to provide the necessary cash flow for *The Soldier's Wife*, which had started shooting with production finance deals yet to be closed and with a budget so low that it was impossible to secure the completion bond required by banks and other investors as insurance against the film going way over budget. The film was thrown into crisis after just three days of shooting when salaries, fees and other bills became due. Most of the cast and crew had turned down more lucrative offers to stay with *The Soldier's Wife* and their patience was nearing its end. When Jordan himself threatened to walk off the set, Woolley was reduced to using his personal credit cards and raiding the meagre box office takings of his cinema. (Giles, 1997, p. 36)

There is a tradition of deferrals on UK film productions in difficulty which dates back to such films as *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, produced by Alexander Korda the year after he founded London Film Productions with his brothers Vincent and Zoltan:

Nobody could deny its success or that it radically altered the climate of film-making and was a turning-point in British cinema. Yet in 1933 Korda had as great a difficulty in getting the film launched as any of his contemporaries. No one in

Wardour Street was prepared to back it and he went on the floor not knowing whether he would have enough money to finish it. Members of the cast were put on deferred payments. (Betts, 1973, p. 149)

Huw, a head of department on *The Crying Game*, said, "I made as much in the percentage [of the fee he had deferred] as on the fee, actually. Because it did well, you know." (1996, p. 9). Don's comment was:

We've got half a point between the whole crew. We got our wages back. We deferred twenty percent of our wages to make the film, my assistant and I. We decided to do that. We weren't happy with it. [LL: Happier now?] ...There's people who are a lot happier than me! I had a full-time assistant at the time we were offered it. Neil Jordan! Wow! What a chance, you know? But the subject matter worried me. IRA? Black transvestite? Bizarre.... But - Neil Jordan! That'll do it for me. Sixteen weeks work before Christmas, would we defer twenty percent of our wages? Yeah, of course we would. And that was the incentive: the profit sharing, which turned out to be fairly minimal, but it's something. I got my wages back and I guess since it was made I'm about £470 on top. Some people are thousands and thousands...Huw, he's thousands and thousands.... See, that's the hierarchy. He's quids in. Woolley will be quids in, Jordan will be quids in, I think [another crew member] opted as well for a larger percentage.... That, to date, is the only thing that gives me any return on anything I've ever made. (1996, pp. 25 - 26)

Sue said, "I had points in *The Crying Game* because they had deferred salary..., which was very nice, but I have to say that none of us expected even to be paid the deferred salary, let alone get any bonuses from it, so it was a very pleasant surprise when it did so well." (1996, p. 16). When I asked Tim if he could give an example of a shared sense of purpose on a film unit, he quipped, "Well, on *The Crying Game*, to get their deferments back!" (1996, p. 25).

Shot on location in Laytown, County Armagh and at outer London's Shepperton Studios, with a total cast and crew of 109 (*Full Cast and Crew for Crying Game, The*, 1992, n.d.),

filming was completed in December 1991. The first rough cut was available for viewing in January 1992. Woolley, Jordan, executive producer Nik Powell, and Jack Lechner from Channel 4 were unhappy with the ending. Jordan wrote an alternative, which was shot for an additional £45,000.

The unit's original director of photography was replaced. Sue said, "The director of photography was sacked after the first week because the director didn't like what he saw on the rushes. Sometimes things don't work out." (1996, p. 19). Huw explained, "I took it over from an American cameraman...I never got to the bottom of it. Good cameraman, just didn't...it was under-exposed, all over the place. I wouldn't do that again, because I didn't have any prep time.... It was too stressful. But I'm glad I did, 'cause it did me a lot of good...It was quite a happy film, really." (1996, p. 24).

As far as Sue was concerned, her experience on the unit hadn't stretched her: "It wasn't a terribly demanding film, in terms of job satisfaction and feeling I'd achieved something, it wasn't really one of [those]." (1996, p. 37).

By contrast, location manager Don was tested to the limit, dealing with complicated logistics and permissions:

The assassination sequence in Eaton Place, which is a very short sequence within the film, but took some of the heaviest work I've done with the police, Diplomatic Police, Royal Protection Group, Diplomatic Squad. The firing of a machine gun in central London on a Sunday afternoon for two hours is not easy, in such a prestigious area as that. It never had been done.... I personally delivered fifteen hundred residents' letters, personally delivered those. I could have asked the runners to do it.... but I was so keen for it to happen, and I could see that it was achievable, and if there was one lady in the basement who heard the guns and rang the police because she hadn't got the letter it would have ruined the whole thing, because the police always said to me, if they get a call, they'll come. They won't stop.... The letters, which we delivered twice, because we initially asked for

people's comments and any opposition to the firing of guns and the filming taking place.... One gentleman, that's all it was, out of fifteen hundred, there's always one, once we'd overcome his fears we then redelivered the letters. Another fifteen hundred letters to anyone within any sort of distance of the gun, or the sound of the guns, that gave the exact detail of when it was going to happen, what time, what was happening, how many police officers were going to be present. The tie-in at the time with two police officers there on radios, one Scotland Yard, Diplomatic Squad, 'cause they're all on different radios and systems, and there's all the embassies and Anti-terrorist Group, it all had to be fed into the system, great Chief Inspector who tied in with me on that from Gerald Road Police Station, who set up that system.... Police officer's direct link to Scotland Yard and you can count it down, the officer counts it down as he hears it on the radio from the special effects man: 10 - 9 - 8 - 7 - 6 - BANG! Scotland Yard pick it up, he checks on the radio, 'Any calls?' 'No.'.... Right. Filming's finished. Now it's all over, anything after now is for real, that's how it has to be.... I was shattered at the end of that. Absolutely. (1996, pp. 48 - 50)

Don was aware of a serious health and safety problem related to special effects used at Shepperton, involving simulated machine gun fire from a helicopter. Since it took place on a back lot at the studio, rather than on location, he hadn't been directly involved. (1996, p. 29). Tim knew more about it:

There was a mistake on *The Crying Game*. When we blew up the greenhouse, one of the prop men went into it without special [pause] and started clearing up and hosing down before the special effects people had given the authority for him to go in, and there was another explosion. He was hurt, but luckily, not very much. I mean, mistakes that threaten injury or life are [pause] I mean, lots of mistakes that've (laughs) but that could have been [pause] [LL: Very nasty?] Somebody dying, you see, on that. [LL: How was that mistake dealt with?] It just happened, and he was out, and he was OK, and everybody, 'Thank god for that - you stupid person!' (1996, p. 14)

Don talked about balancing the demands of the unit against his long-term career prospects:

We do live in the world of make-believe, we live in the world of fantasy, we do play with very big toys, but you just can't take them anywhere and play with them. Someone has to clear the way first.... Even with Neil [Neil Jordan, the director], we'd go on endless reccys [visits to possible locations] working out what we're going to do and he wanted this special camera crane and track laid in a roadway within the City for the final sequence of *The Crying Game*, which was never shown. They changed the end. So that's how important it was.... But he wanted his camera and the track and the crane and everything else, and, 'That's where it's to be, Don.' And it's blocked three roads in the City.... We laid it on and we set it up and it was there and we had full permission, and it was tricky in a way, because it was close to a hospital, so ambulances had to be notified and re-routed...but on the day, he wanted to change it. He wanted to block the road which the ambulances knew they could use, and it was a stand-off. I had to stand my ground. That's the problem with filming. If you've got four weeks up front, yes, you can do it. On the day you change it? It just doesn't work like that, some parts of film it can happen like that, some parts of film just can't because there's too much gone into it.... There's far too many permissions, and so many people have been notified.... Now, if I'd let it become totally disorganised and changed it on the day, the next time I went to the City and asked, 'Listen, guys, I want to shut three streets down.' 'Don, can't let you, mate. The last time you did it, you let us down.' And that's the next job being let down. That's me, that's my trade. I can't begin to operate, you know? (1996, pp. 6 - 7)

Opinions were divided about producer Steve Woolley. Huw thought that working with him was similar to working with producer Sarah Radclyffe, who is well respected in the industry, characterising Woolley as "a good man." (1996, p. 25). Don disagreed:

I had my fair share of run-ins with Steve, and that's no secret.... 'Cause Steve Woolley, he was tricky, he was pushing money around and I had a certain sort of

job to do and a role to play and I felt that he was restricting me at times. A couple of confrontations with him.... People say, 'Oh, wasn't he a lovely guy!'..... No way. What a pain in the ass! But their values were different to mine. (1996, p. 41)

The film was renamed after Stanley Kubrick advised Neil Jordan that films with military titles were not audience magnets. Image maker Chris Fowler of The Creative Partnership said, "We retitled *The Crying Game* - originally it was called *The Soldier's Wife* which gives off two things, a happily married man, boring, and a soldier, which at that time was a massive turn off. We ended up going through the *Book of British Singles* - *The Crying Game* doesn't mean anything except there's some kind of tension about it, a game, mischief, it feels like there's more to it." (Jones & Jolliffe, 2000, p. 270).

The Crying Game was finished just in time to be considered for Cannes, but the jury turned it down by majority vote and it was not screened.

By April 1992 Palace was bankrupt:

Towards the late 80s Palace over-diversified, moving into pop promos, television, recording studios and too many loss-making businesses while their latest productions flopped and the company suffered a dearth of distribution hits. Like so many companies set up in the 80s, Palace was built on credit and crashed when the recession-stung banks pulled back on their lending. Palace left around £18 million of debt and a lot of ill will which was still raw when *The Crying Game* was released in the UK on 30 October 1992, distributed by another company, Mayfair, as part of a pre-insolvency deal. The film's release coincided with a renewed thrust in the IRA's campaign on the mainland, which perhaps made the press wary of *The Crying Game*. (Giles, 1997, p. 40)

Don was left with a debt in his own name from *The Crying Game* as a result of the company's collapse:

I did come across a payment which they didn't complete, which was for parking meters, which were my application. I went for those for *The Crying Game*. There was a lot of filming around Hoxton Square, Hackney Borough Council, and as time fathoms out, you don't actually get back to Hackney for a while, it's just the way the business works. So I ring up a good friend, D.Y., does the meters, he said, 'Don, I'm sorry man, I can't let you have these. You're on the blacklist, there's a debt against your name.' I said, 'It's not me as an individual.' He said, 'I know that. It's the company. It's all in the hands of our lawyers, trying to get the money.'... Got hold of Steve Woolley and I said, 'Come on, Steve, I know you've got problems but it's me, mate, it's my name, it's not your name, it's not *The Crying Game* or whatever else, it's ME.' He cleared it for me. All of a sudden my job was being affected. Now I make a point of policy, lesson learnt, everywhere I go now, especially with local authorities...these production companies, they pay up front. I can't run that risk. (1997, p. 8)

Initially, the film did poorly in the UK:

Although *Variety* (2 November 1992) tallied ten UK critics in favour of the film, with only three mixed reviews and none completely against it, looking in detail at the overall response reveals a rather less rosy picture. The UK critics were bemused by PR company pleas not to reveal the twist and commented on this in their reviews, making it sound as though they were dutifully exposing a con man's cheap gimmick.... The sense was very much of the critics refusing to join in the game....The mixed reviews would not have been so much of a problem were it not for the lack of other media coverage....Woolley believed that the critics were 'sharpening their knives and going for a pound of Palace flesh'.... Woolley also felt that Mayfair failed to book the film to its best advantage.... Opening the film too wide in the capital and too soon in the regions... (Giles, 1997, pp 42 - 45)

By Christmas 1992, the film had only grossed £300,000 in the United Kingdom, although the final UK box office take rose to around £2 million.

In the USA, Miramax, a maverick production and distribution company which had co-produced some of Palace's previous films, bought the distribution rights to *The Crying Game*. The film's total gross in the USA, \$62,546,695, was 2.35 times the average gross for the 166 films released in 1992 (*The Numbers - Movies Released in 1992*, n.d.).

The financial success of *The Crying Game* in the US was astonishing. It became 1993's most profitable film based on the gap between negative cost and domestic gross, and was the only independent production to figure in the top fifteen titles. Reckoning a budget of \$5 million and a box-office take of \$59,348,005 [in the USA], the film's ratio of 11.9 was nearly double that of the second most profitable title, *Jurassic Park* (*Screen International*, 14 - 20 January 1994). *The Crying Game* would far exceed the supposed \$25 million box office ceiling for art house movies, grossing around \$68 million in the States. Although little of the profits filtered back to the UK (where the final box office was around £2 million)... (Giles, 1997, p. 50)

It was also a huge artistic success:

Whereas UK reviewers had picked at *The Crying Game*, the US critics unreservedly declared it to be the film of the year and tackled it in the manner of a starving gourmet approaching a delicious feast. The structural twist was compared to Hitchcock's films *Psycho* and *Vertigo*. Shakespeare's comedies were cited. The film's ironic black humour was repeatedly praised. (Giles, 1997, p. 46)

Excerpts from *The Crying Game* reviews included:

'An astonishingly good and daring film that richly develops several intertwined thematic lines, [taking] risks that are stunningly rewarded.' (Todd McCarthy, *Variety*, 14 September 1992). (Giles, p. 46)

'At the request of the film-makers, reviewers have taken a blood oath not to reveal the twists of this astonishing, darkly amusing, dizzyingly romantic thriller...Quick – go see it for yourself!' (*Cosmopolitan*, January 1993). (Giles, 1997, p. 47)

The Crying Game received six nominations at the 1993 Academy Awards: Best Film; Best Supporting Actor (Jay Davidson); Best Director (Neil Jordan), Best Actor (Stephen Rea); Best Film Editing (Kant Pan) and Best Original Screenplay (Neil Jordan). Neil Jordan won an Academy Award for his screenplay. His next project was a \$60 million adaptation of Anne Rice's novel *Interview with the Vampire* (Giles, 1997). Steve Woolley continued to produce, and his filmography includes: *Backbeat* (1994), *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), *The Neon Bible* (1996), *Michael Collins* (1996), *The Hollow Reed* (1997), *The Butcher Boy* (1998), *TwentyFourSeven* (1998), *Welcome to Woop Woop* (1998), *Little Voice* (1998), *In Dreams* (1999), *B. Monkey* (1999), *Fever Pitch* (1999), *The End of the Affair* (1999) and *The Last September* (2000) (Stephen Woolley, n.d.).

The unit which produced *The Crying Game*, the most profitable film of 1992, a world renowned critical success, and an Academy Award winner, was a deeply troubled one. Because the script's subject matter was considered problematic, it was difficult to raise the necessary finance. It nearly folded in the early days of filming due to financial difficulties so severe that unit staff could not be paid in full at the time. *The Crying Game* almost failed to be distributed because Palace, its parent company, folded during post-production. Artistically, disaster was narrowly averted when the director of photography was sacked and replaced after producing poor quality rushes during the initial week of principal photography. The ending had to be rewritten and reshot, which involved additional costs. A member of the crew was nearly killed when a special effects stunt went badly wrong at Shepperton. The location manager was left with debts in his own name for services he had contracted on behalf of the unit. His throw-away comment about accepting a deferred salary on *The Crying Game* reflects the sometimes harsh realities of freelancing for temporary organizations: of course contract workers will accept 20% deferrals if otherwise they would lose sixteen weeks of work before Christmas - normally a very slow time of year for British film production.

4.3 **FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL (1994)**

Unlike any previous specialized (read: upscale urban art-house) hit, *Four Weddings*, in its sixth week, became the No. 1 movie in the [USA]....*Four Weddings* widened to 900 screens only last week [after opening on only 5], but it's already grossed \$24.7 million, a spectacular sum for a low-budget foreign art film with one name American actress in a cast of British unknowns, and it could top out at twice that. (Thompson, 1994, pp. 1 - 2)

[PolyGram] broke out the champagne over the critical and box-office success of "Four Weddings and a Funeral," starring Hugh Grant and Andie MacDowell. Produced by Working Title Pictures and distributed by PolyGram's Gramercy Pictures, the film cost an estimated \$4 million and has grossed more than \$130 million worldwide so far [8/20/94].... Harold Vogel, senior entertainment analyst with Merrill Lynch, says the movie did not contribute much to first-half profitability. "There's more to come," he says. "It will have a much more important impact in the second half." That's when it will work its way into all international theatrical markets and distribution channels such as home video, pay-per-view television, and cable and broadcast TV. (Jeffrey, 1994, p. 2)

Four Weddings and a Funeral was directed by Mike Newell and produced by Working Title Films, the London-based mini-major discussed in chapter three, which has turned out many other box office and critical hits. *Sight and Sound* summarised the plot of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*:

Charles is a frequent wedding goer, along with his urban *haute bourgeoisie* friends - the sharp-tongued Fiona and her wealthy brother Tom, his own deaf brother David, his punky flatmate Scarlett and the effusive Gareth and his lover Matthew. None of them, however, have ever risked marriage themselves. But at a wedding in Somerset, Charles is struck by a beautiful stranger, Carrie. Fiona promptly tells him that Carrie is a slut and out of his league anyway, but Carrie surprises him by

taking him to bed. The next morning, Carrie goes back to America, leaving Charles befuddled.

At a London wedding two months later, Charles sees Carrie again, but his hopes are dashed when she introduces her new fiancé, Hamish. Charles spends the rest of the evening beleaguered by vengeful ex-girlfriends; he is particularly embarrassed to see the over-emotional Henrietta, who bursts into tears. But Carrie rescues him. Hamish has left for a business trip, so they spend a second night together.

A month later, Charles receives an invitation to Carrie's wedding. As he dutifully goes to buy her a gift, he runs into her. Over coffee, Carrie enumerates the 33 men she has slept with. Charles makes a fumbling declaration of love, but nevertheless finds himself at her wedding shortly afterwards. At the party, Fiona admits to him that she has always loved him, and Henrietta, who has a new boyfriend, seems much more together. Then Gareth suddenly has a heart attack. The friends reconvene at his funeral. Afterwards, moved by Matthew's speech, Charles wonders if he will ever feel that way about anyone himself.

Ten months later, however, Charles is about to marry Henrietta. As his friends, apart from Fiona, meet their ideal mates, Carrie reappears, conveniently separated from Hamish, throwing Charles into confusion. He decides to go through with the wedding anyway, but with David's encouragement he jilts Henrietta at the altar. Carrie and Charles agree not to get married 'til death do they part. (Myers, 1994, p. 47)

The full cast and crew ran to around 202 people (*Full Cast and Crew for Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), n.d.). The film's total USA gross, \$52,700,832, was 1.97 times the average gross for the 185 films released in 1994 (*The Numbers - Movies Released in 1994*, n.d.). However, as Ian Nathan pointed out in an article published in *Empire* (1995), although the film eventually grossed \$230 million worldwide, it is essential to take all costs into account in considering how profitable it was. Of the USA gross box office (\$52 million), Nathan reckons that the cinemas took slightly more than 50%, leaving \$25

million. The distributor took a cut of 33% of the remainder, leaving around \$17 million. USA marketing cost \$15 million.

Take off the cost of making the film - \$4.5 million – and you're in the red.... If the most successful British film ever had only been released in the US it would have actually *lost* money.... The truth is most films don't cover their costs at the cinema. They usually have to pass into TV and video before the red turns to black on the bank statement. (p. 101)

Kay explained how Duncan Kenworthy (producer) and Richard Curtis (writer) brought the project to Working Title, and therefore retained considerable power during the production process: "It wasn't like it came up through Working Title. It was enormously collaborative, they had a huge influence on it. Huge. They knew what they wanted to do with it." (1996, p. 26). She spoke of how the project was developed: "Originally it was going to be higher budget. Then it was cut right back down again. It went through an awful lot of paring up and down and a long development process which had to stop, because we couldn't raise the money. Then it started again, at a lower budget." (1996, p. 26). For Don, this stuttering meant that he did not work on the film:

You mentioned *Four Weddings and a Funeral*...that's in my diary from 1992 or something. A guy...rang, said would I like to do this film, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*? I was working on the TV series *Minder*. I said, "Yeah, I think the time is just right." Wrote it down. And it folded, never went. Then it came back up. A good friend of mine, P.S. did it. And P.S. is living off the back of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* like no tomorrow. Now the Americans can't get enough of him because he was the location manager on that. Pure fate. Pure chance at the time. But, I don't know, perhaps if I'd been in there early enough and helped develop it a little bit...maybe a missed opportunity but perhaps mine was to come elsewhere. (1996, p. 19)

Don evaluated his near-miss in terms of reputational assets: his friend's had been enhanced, and Don had missed a valuable opportunity when the film was rescheduled to his disadvantage.

Pam's opinion about what made some film units better or worse than others had been coloured by her experience on *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. In response to my question, "If the money is below x, is it going to be a less pleasant experience?" she said,

No. I worked on *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, that was a really low budget movie, that was a TV-type budget movie, and I didn't have an assistant on that. I had a runner, probably three weeks before we were due to start shooting.... And it was great! Terrific! I coped fine and thoroughly enjoyed it.... It's the atmosphere with the crew, how happy they feel with the project, with the director; if they get feedback from the top it spreads right across.... So if people feel they're part of the film, they'll work a lot harder; if they feel the director's there behind them, they'll work a lot harder. (1996, p. 7)

She stressed the importance of the unit's belief in the film: "*Four Weddings and a Funeral* left people with a feel-good factor. People wanted to do that film, they enjoyed doing it. The money was bad, but we were all rooting for it, there was a general sense of YES, we're going to go for this." (p. 31). Pam expanded on the excitement generated within the unit:

- We were very lowly paid. There were whinges about it. As soon as we recognised that it was going to be a good film, and the artists and the cast and the crew were gelling with each other, then the moaning minnies stopped and began to realise very quickly that we had a hit on our hands.... I knew it was going to be a hit when
- I read the script.... Because it was so delightful, it was just such a simple script. (p. 35)

She felt the tone had been set by senior management:

It comes down from the top. On a really happy movie you'll inevitably find that management have been the reason why, because they've projected a happy atmosphere. On *Four Weddings and a Funeral* the same thing happened. You had a producer who was fun and jolly, a director who was similar, and that crept all the way down. (pp. 28 - 29)

Making *Four Weddings and a Funeral* seems to have been a happy experience all around. In casting USA star Andie MacDowell to play opposite the unknown British Hugh Grant, the film employed a formula for success discussed in chapter three. Although it was a very low budget film, it was backed by the comparatively stable Working Title Films, and Newell managed to secure the enthusiastic commitment of his cast and crew, who believed in the potential of the film, and enjoyed making it. Kay explained how a substantial amount of time had been spent developing the concept and the script. Don was aware that his life might have been very different had the film been made at a point when he was available to participate. Instead, his friend, who was part of the unit, now has the extensive list of USA contacts which would have been Don's. The lottery that is freelance work in temporary organizations is exemplified in this anecdote, as is the importance of reputational assets.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS: TWO PRODUCTION CASE STUDIES

Two mythical films, two low-budget British features, two world-beating box office performances: two radically different temporary organizations have been considered in this chapter. *The Crying Game* was hastily pulled together by Steve Woolley as his film empire crumbled and produced by a stressed, conflicted unit working on fractional salaries. *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, by contrast, spent more than three years in pre-pre-production development, and was a happy, if poorly paid, unit. Both films were made through the same processes of pre-pre-production, pre-production, production and post-production described in chapter three. Both depended on scripts, schedules, call sheets, daily reports and the hierarchical structures common to UK feature film units. It is clear from just these two cases that there is a wide range of experiences within units which produce successful feature films, and that the nature of the experience for freelances within the unit is not a valid predictor of a film's artistic or financial success or failure.

When asked whether or not film units compared their performances against one another, Kay felt that while Working Title might compare the company's overall performance against similar companies, "we don't have anything to compare box office revenue[s] on.

For us to compare box office revenue on *Four Weddings and a Funeral* against box office revenue on *The Crying Game*? What's the point?" (1996, p. 7). Reflective practice only takes place in a limited way in film units, focusing around specific issues individuals want to replicate or avoid in the future. Available time on units is directed towards achieving excellence on the film in hand.

Participants did mention specific learning points. Don, for example, learned not to allow unit contracts to be issued in his name. He discovered that he needed to assert himself with the director and the producer. Don, Huw, Sue and Tim found, long after the unit folded, that deferrals could be profitable. Kay realised (after the unit had been disbanded) that spending a substantial amount of time in pre-pre-production doing re-writes had been worthwhile.

Something strange happens when units become the focus of an enquiry into film production. It is too easy to focus on those common elements of units and the unit experience which are tangible or visible to all – elements of the paperwork, or the process of principle photography itself. Units are like icebergs – the visible is underpinned by massive invisible, tacit elements. In the case of units, these would include vast and complex ranges and groupings of networks. Concentrating on units, therefore, had a curious figure/ground effect, obscuring features which have turned out to be crucial to this study – the effect of extreme temporariness, for example. Intangible aspects were mentioned or implied by participants, but when considered within the container of the unit, they did not seem as compelling as they do in the context of the sector or in terms of implications for individual freelancers' careers.

Chapter five explores the ways in which learning takes place in temporary organizations such as film units through the insights of ten experienced managers who freelance on feature film units, including all of the people interviewed for the embedded case studies in this chapter. Six themes, three from learning organization theory and three which emerged from the data, are considered.

CHAPTER FIVE

HIGH SPEED, HIGH PRESSURE LEARNING IN UK FILM UNITS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter uses evidence obtained during fieldwork to demonstrate how people learn in temporary organizations such as UK feature film production units.

Six themes are considered here. The most significant, and the central issue to emerge from fieldwork data, was the dominating significance of the temporary nature of film units. The necessity of operating within a very tight time-limited framework of contract-based employment colours every aspect of work in film units, and this issue is addressed in section 5.1.1.

Section 5.2, experiential learning, examines three core themes that emerged from an analysis of learning organization theory (chapter two) in function of the fieldwork data from this study: learning is tied to action, problem solving, and commitment to learning.

In addition to temporariness, two other important themes emerged during coding: employment practices and networking. Sections 5.3 and 5.4 consider these. Finally, there is a conclusions section.

5.1.1 WORK IN A TEMPORARY ORGANIZATION

Everyone has limited time and works that much harder; tomorrow really doesn't count. Equally, because nobody is giving their undivided loyalty, managers have to work harder to maintain cohesiveness and momentum. (Howkins, 2001, p. 136)

Participants in this study variously celebrated temporary organizations and articulated the sometimes extreme difficulties of working within them.

In their study of a UK film production tracked over a year, Blair, Grey and Randle (2001) used quantitative methodology to establish working patterns experienced by its crew. The average number of projects each crew member completed in the year prior to their study was 5, the average length of a project was 7.4 weeks, the average length of the working day was 12.1 hours, an average working week being 69 hours spread over 5.6 days. 59% of the crew “had always worked in a freelance capacity and had never been permanently employed either in the film or television industries.... Those entering the industry after 1990, had predominantly always been freelance” (p. 8). For freelance contract workers there is no holiday pay, no employer’s pension scheme, and no provision for illness. Anyone who is unhappy with the terms and conditions on offer will be replaced immediately. Everyone on a unit is expected to give a peak performance, regardless of personal circumstances. Individuals are subject to summary dismissal if their work is found to be unsatisfactory.

Even the data above, extreme though it is, does not convey the conditions which pertain on some units. Pam told of a difficult situation she faced when unit personnel assumed that a 12 hour shooting day meant a 12 hour working day, when in actuality it meant 16 hour days for most departments in order to service 12 hours of daily principal photography:

We had immense problems with people.... The production manager tries to appease the situation, that’s his or her job, the usual sort of attitude from further up in management is ‘They don’t have to do the job if they don’t like it. They can always go. We can always get someone else.’ Because it’s a freelance business, you know. (1996, p. 3)

In general, there is minimal employer loyalty to staff, as it is an employers’ market. Blair and Rainnie (1998) have noted that “according to a recent issue of Stage, Screen and Radio, British film and television freelances work some of the longest hours in Europe, yet

the employers association PACT [Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television] are wanting to negotiate a further extension of working hours.” (p. 15).

Of this study’s ten participants, nine emphasised the significance of working in temporary organizations, and the tenth referred to it obliquely. This was the key reason for deciding on an embedded single-case design for this research, as discussed in chapter one. On the basis of Blair, Grey and Randle’s (2001) research findings above, someone interviewed five years after the demise of a particular unit may have worked in twenty-five intervening temporary organizations - no wonder participants were hazy about the details of their experiences on *The Crying Game* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral* units, as noted in chapter four.

For freelances, the industry as a whole is the salient entity to which they relate, rather than to individual film units in which they work for such brief periods of time. As Ann pondered when responding to a question about benchmarking, “For a film unit to compare its performance against others? I never quite know whether people see themselves enough as a bonded unit in that way.... You don’t have that sense about, ‘Only this film unit could have done that.’ ” (1996, p. 18).

The notion of a boundaryless industry is universal among the freelances who participated in this study. It is expressed in Jim’s explanation of why benchmarking is not used as a management tool by film units: “That doesn’t happen because everybody comes out of the same pool and everybody disappears back into the same pool.” (1993, p. 21).

When asked if units compare performance against one another, Tim replied, “Units? No, I don’t think units stay together long enough ever to feel that they have an identity.” (1996, p. 4). Sue thought similarly: “You’re only a unit for a very short period of time. You’re talking about individuals who are brought together to make a unit for a short period of time.” (1996, p. 30).

Don used a metaphor to describe working in short-lived units:

There's lots of separate little circles working all the time. It's like that as a freelance person within the industry. You're networking within a circle of people, certain production managers you work for on a regular basis, certain producers you work for, certain directors might ask for you, certain designers might ask for you, so you can go for a couple of years and never break that circle. Then, all of a sudden, the circle breaks. Circle's broken here [referring to the job he was doing at the time of the interview]: I've never worked for [production company] before, never worked for [production supervisor] or [producer] or [designer]. So this is another circle. It's good, all of a sudden you're working with more individuals. (1996, p. 16)

Bob told me,

I have the people that I like to use and if a director or a producer doesn't have somebody in whatever grades, I'll put forward those people, if I think they're right. Sometimes people aren't. You're dealing with personalities who've got to be chucked together for a very short space of time as opposed to the normal industrial world or workplace, where you're put together for years. (1993, p. 8)

Later he added, "Because it is gypsy-like, although you'd like to try and keep the same people, you might never see some of them again workwise" (1993, p. 22). Summing up his thoughts on working in units, Bob emphasised,

It is this thing of shortness of time.... If you're not worried about continuity of work, and you're willing to [take a] risk. Some people can't cope with that, a lot of people say, 'God! I couldn't. I couldn't not know what I was going to be doing in six months time.' It gets to you. You sometimes think, 'I would love to plan a holiday with my son or my family, and I can't really, [not] yet.' (1997, p. 27)

Kay said,

[Production company] never used to get it, how important it is for freelance people to do their job well. It's an entirely different mind-set. You're only as good as your

last job.... It's hard sometimes for people [at her production company], they say to me, 'Well, how do you know they're [freelances] going to do a good job?' And you say, 'Because they'll never work again! Don't, please, ever underestimate that!' (1996, pp. 27 - 28)

She spoke of the immense pressure and drastic consequences working for temporary organizations can bring:

You're responsible for turning 'round more money within a three month period than sizeable companies turn 'round annually, and the intensity of the job is so enormous that you will put the rest of your life on hold and you will see one hell of a lot of sad people up the other end of it all. People sacrifice an awful lot to this business, and whether it's worth it or not, I don't know. (Kay, 1996, p. 29)

As a contract worker, Sue had experienced the level of severe pressure Kay described, but for different reasons:

I did my first feature film as a production manager and two weeks into the pre-production period I discovered that I [had a serious health problem] and I had to go into hospital and have [immediate major surgery]. [The producer] goes, 'What we'll do, we'll cut your salary, I'll phone you at home, I'll put a fax machine at home, you can just oversee it from home, and when you're well enough, you can come back.' Two weeks after I'd had the operation, I went in for the production meeting and I found that nothing had been done, nothing. He hadn't taken care of anything. And so I started back to work, two weeks after I had this operation, and physically it nearly killed me. It was awful.... My husband was going through a bad patch and didn't have any work, so I had to do it. I couldn't just turn around and say, 'Screw this, my life is more important!' I had to do it and I was terrified that I wouldn't be able to do it well because I was so physically under par, but it was really important that I didn't fuck it up. Somehow you do it. I seriously thought, 'After this, nothing can be worse,' pushing yourself this way, but you do. And I managed to finish it with my reputation intact, but it nearly killed me to do it.

Whereas, any other industry, I would have been on full pay for the entire recovery period. (1996, pp. 14 - 15)

Ed explained how the freelance mindset influenced crews' moods and expectations on low budget units:

In low budget filming, in terms of people's expectations, you're paying them relatively little. Therefore, you have to make the other things comfortable for them. If you're paying people a fat amount of money and taking them away from home into good hotels and feeding them the best food and they turn up early in the morning and the actor refuses to come out of the caravan, nobody actually cares. They'll sit and read *The Daily Telegraph* until the cows come home. But if you're not paying them a lot of money, they all sit there and think about the commercial they could have been doing and the money they could have been earning. (1997, p. 7)

He knew that he received special treatment because of his status within the unit, and because freelances always have an eye on the future:

When you're a production manager and you turn up at a set, the drivers are saying, 'Hi, how are you doing today? Listen, do you want me to take your car today and get it cleaned?' They're not approving of you, you're the production manager. You are the source of their next job. Like you or not, they will brown-nose to you. (1997, p. 17)

Huw referred to the short term nature working on features tangentially: "We worked six-day weeks in Poland for a month, just to get the hell out of there.... Because we knew we were going to finish the film with six five-day weeks [in Germany], so it was fine" (1996, p. 20). He was concerned about working six-day weeks and twelve-hour days, not with the nature of temporary employment, which, as a veteran of the industry, he accepted unquestioningly.

As well as providing immediate employment, units serve as showcases, affording individuals opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, abilities and personalities, with a view to securing future work. They may receive a direct invitation to work on a forthcoming film. They are aware that others on the unit may be asked to comment on their performance in reference to future work opportunities. They also know that networking ensures rapid word of mouth transmission of gossip within the unit and the industry. Unit members find themselves working very hard indeed to delight current employers whilst simultaneously looking for their next or next-but-one job. Film critics publicly assess actors and directors when a film is released. Within units, each individual is judged by co-workers as they watch one another deliver specialist skills, whether chippie, runner or producer.

Howkins (2001) defines the temporary company as minimalist,

...focusing on the raw ingredients of work: objective, people and jobs-as-things-to-be-done. Its lifetime is generally less than a year.... [It] provides the social, intellectual and managerial framework for managing a creative process. It is fit-for-purpose and tightly drawn.... It has no baggage from the past.... It will have both its own in-house people and links with outside people, and usually blur the boundaries between them. (pp. 136 - 137)

Film units are different kinds of temporary organizations than the temporary company that Howkins describes, because they do not contain in-house people. Even films produced by Working Title will only have three or four link individuals assigned to a unit, and they will usually be responsible for overseeing a number of units simultaneously. Film units, however funded, are fundamentally stand-alone nexus of freelance contract workers. This is what distinguishes them from projects, where most or many individuals are employed full time elsewhere and are loaned to the project team - or themselves join together as a project-cluster - for a specific time-limited purpose.

Blair, Grey and Randle (2001), criticising Langham, note that in her view, the uncertainty which characterises working in film production "is treated quite unproblematically as a

benign feature of a futuristic world of employment. Uncertainties such as having unpredictable income levels and periodic bouts of unemployment, do not feature in the Langham model” (p. 4).

Because of the temporary nature of film units, contract workers are compelled to think beyond the boundaries of the organization in which they currently work. They are aware of past units, current units running in parallel with their own, and units that are likely to come together in the near future. Forthcoming employment depends on a highly honed ability to keep an ear to the ground and an eye to the main chance. One interesting feature of units that are composed entirely of contract workers is the tremendous emphasis on the need for individuals to perform well within their current unit in order to secure their next job.

Working in units, which is like leaping from tussock to tussock in order to cross a swamp, makes the immediate future hugely compelling. The present can seem merely a gateway to the future. Perhaps a better analogy is waiting in the departure lounge of an airport, but focusing on the flight to come, rather than the wait or the conditions of waiting. This mindset, and the planned decommissioning of units after films are delivered to financiers, probably contribute to particular problems common in the industry, and these are discussed below in sections on closure and health and safety.

Closure

When temporary organizations cease trading, obligations may still be outstanding. In chapter four, Don described a problem he encountered years after making *The Crying Game* because invoices in his name had not been honoured by Palace Pictures. Sue described a similar situation:

Credibility: this is where co-ordinators and production managers do a huge amount for the company [unit]. Companies are using [freelances'] credibility and [freelances'] contacts in order to...function. Things would cost a lot more, and

they wouldn't get the credit. A lot of the cash flow that they get is down to the contacts that their production team have already. It's very undervalued, too....

What really upsets me, a couple of times, it was the same company both times, who I work with a lot, if someone's not paid quickly whilst you're in production and they phone you up and say, 'Hey, Sue,...where's the money? We did this deal based on the fact that we'd get paid at such and such an interval.' And I can go to the accountant or I can go to the producer or the production supervisor and say, 'Look, this is the deal, I want the cheque now!'.... The problem's in post-production where sometimes [units] just don't pay. Once the accountant is out of the picture.... [LL: It's your credibility that gets stuffed.] Yeah, and that really upsets me. (1996, pp 10 - 11)

This excerpt also illustrates how a freelancer's networks are central to the "complex, uncertain and ambiguous" processes of creating a film (Daskalaki & Blair, 2002, p. 2)

Bob described a problem arising during production that lingered on for years after the end of the unit:

We had to find a ready-made castle.... The woman that owned the place procrastinated and spent ages with her solicitor, we had to change the contract, and it came to a point where I had the construction team in the car park waiting to get in to start work, and we still hadn't signed it off, because she kept changing the rules, and it became a nightmare! We knew it was a nightmare but we couldn't back out and I had to go ahead and sign a deal that I wasn't exactly happy with. Our lawyers said, '...we know we're going to have a few problems but it should be solvable.' It just went on forever and we overran, so we got into our penalty payments which were negotiated up front...she wanted a lot more and I had to agree to it.... Anyway, I think it's still going on in one way or the other because we had to repair the castle, and we did, but there was a big grey area, where the period for penalty payments was due, and when it finished, and she felt it should go on and on and on. I'm not sure whether it's been settled out of court or not yet. But that was three years ago. I felt that was quite a big problem, I didn't feel

responsible for it, I didn't get blamed for it, but I hated it!.... 20th Century Fox were financing the film, so they took it [the problem] over when [the producer] delivered the film. (1997, p. 4)

Units end with the completion of the production process and the delivery of the film, even if legal liability does not. Don and Sue found that their personal reputations had been compromised because their units had not been properly wound down. Bob was fortunate that the contracts he signed were not in his own name, and that the film's financiers picked up the issue after the unit ceased trading.

Health and safety

Christ, it's only a film.... I've said that in front of someone who thought I was a complete lunatic. But it is, it's only a film!... The worst decisions that are made in this business are decisions that affect people's health and safety. (Kay, 1996, p. 16)

Many industries use hazardous locations, processes, technologies, equipment, procedures and processes under specially controlled and regulated conditions. Managing risk during the manufacture of a feature film has similarities. What is different, perhaps, are the risks management and workers are prepared to take in the context of a temporary organization.

In part, making films is about paying people to take risks in order to get specific images up on the screen. Stunts and special effects are two areas where risks are, in theory, carefully assessed. Freelances are aware of the risks involved, and have planned in advance how to protect themselves. Such undertakings are designed to look dangerous on film, but in reality to be safe for participants. This section does not deal with such matters, except where risk has been improperly assessed or stunts/special effects have been inadequately planned or designed.

Health and safety issues that arise in connection with film units have antecedents in matters of the industrial regulation (or lack thereof) of nineteenth century British theatre production and exhibition. Summarising and commenting on an 1881 leader in the *Stage* that outlined backstage arrangements in a “newly opened elegant theatre” Davis (2000, p. 72) described disgusting and hazardous conditions of theatrical production, which “were only uniformly improved by the insistence of the actors’ union in the twentieth century, through threats to withdraw labour in a closed shop system.” (p. 72).

It may be that the temporary nature of film units makes them more difficult to regulate than permanent businesses with fixed premises, cinemas, for example.

The feeling that working in a unit is temporary, and therefore in some sense insignificant, contributes to an industry-wide tolerance of unsatisfactory management and working practices. These are endured because freelances know they will only have to put up with them in the short term. As Jim pointed out:

When something happens [a major problem] that makes the whole unit warp like that, you’ve got to remember that often people just struggle through to the end, because it’s just a couple of months. They think, ‘Fuck, what a bad experience!’ instead of stopping and thinking, ‘Right. I’m going to correct this!’ because it’s not long term. It’s very rarely that you stop and say, ‘Right!’ unless it’s really fucking something up. (1993, p. 59)

Most participants in this study were concerned about health and safety issues. Eight out of the ten participants mentioned health and safety concerns during their interviews, and some, Ed, for example, spoke at length about problems he had encountered in this area. Of the two people who did not mention health and safety, one had certainly worked on a film unit on which there was a serious special effects accident.

The range of health and safety problems mentioned by participants ranged from the mundane to the dramatic. Pam described the kind of every day problem many units face:

We start at half past eight and work until midnight, and the next morning we'd be called at eight o'clock.... Then work until nine o'clock that night. You never had quite enough time to rest properly. And some people would have hour and a half drives.... Going back to the all-in deals, it's fine, you do get paid well, but they [management] do take advantage of you and very gradually [conditions] have eroded. (1996, p. 18)

Similarly, Sue said "People have had accidents, they've crashed their cars because they've been so tired they can't drive." (1996, pp. 30 - 31).

Ed had ongoing concerns about electricians' health and safety practices:

Electricians, God love them, they pull up in a generator of a hundred and twenty thousand watts of power on the back of it, they put up all these cables in a room, plug up these lights you could heat a household with, and then they sod off to the pub at lunchtime. They come back - they should have been breathalysed - and start working with electricity again. Now, who's going to confess that to the Health and Safety Executive? But try and stop it! (1997, pp. 1 - 3)

Working on location prompted many of the health and safety concerns which participants mentioned. Ed gave dramatic examples:

In trying to find out what was safe and what was unsafe [I] spoke to the architects...one of the guys in the office said, 'We wouldn't touch this.... Off the record, when the wind blows, parts of that building will fall off,' he said, 'I wouldn't let a dog go in there, far less take a crew in.' Now, we ended up spending I can't remember how many thousand pounds putting a scaffolding canopy up that people could stand under, so when bits did fall off the building they landed on the canopy.... I was ill for the three days that were filmed there.... You get to the point where you're assessing the risk and you're doing that quietly 'cause you don't want to panic people.... You think, 'This is really dangerous!' and you've got to go public, seek out the producer, and say, 'Hey! I don't think this building is safe.' And at that point you're saying to somebody who has

struggled to put a co-production in place, who has committed to the co-production, or British Screen committed some money, and the [international co-producers] are filming, and they've booked plane tickets, and you're saying the principal location is unfilmable. And the only reason the co-production's working is that they've agreed to come to [the UK] to shoot this location. This location's a death trap.... There was a horrible twenty-four hour period where I didn't know whether or not we could make this work, and we got a tame architect, a man who'd dealt with films before and understood what I was trying to do, and he came and surveyed the site and said, 'If you do the following things I would say that you've done the best you can to make this safe.' He gave the report, which we paid for, and we then spent a lot of money putting up scaffolding, buying hard hats and so on. It worked, but there was a horrible period.... And it happened recently on another job where we had a building which I thought was dangerous, and we were doing things which were dangerous, and you stand on the side lines and you think, 'Please, don't let anybody fall off that!' (1997, pp. 20 - 21)

He spoke of his feelings of personal responsibility for units' health and safety, and his concerns about his legal position in the event of an accident during production:

The Health and Safety are implementing the Factories Act. As far as they're concerned, we're a factory.... If somebody working for production has had an accident, the production manager had better have a really good explanation of why he's not responsible.... The bottom line is that if I can't protect them [freelances] in the workplace, then I will protect myself in court. (Ed, 1997, p. 5)

Ed saw the responsibility for health and safety as the producer's: "Ultimately, this comes back to the producer. What's the producer's attitude? We can only enforce those things that the producer will endorse." (1997, p. 5).

Location manager Don described himself as *Mr. No* with regard to health and safety issues:

You've got a challenge, got to stop the filming. Phone call: 'Don, you stopped the filming!' That's the all-important reply. Got to give him the answer, and it better be a bloody good one as well. All sorts of things can happen during the day. A fire engine doesn't turn up. So they decide to go ahead and film the fire sequence anyway. They will, because nobody's told them, 'No!' as yet. It's down to myself and the production manager to tell them no. But they're going to go ahead with it, but, 'Hold up, where's the fire engine? We haven't got fire cover!' 'Oh, we just thought we'd do this little bit first.' 'No!' I'm not health and safety officer. That's what I want to be. I feel that my position needs that now.... I challenge under common sense part of the time. It's bizarre. Why me? Why have I got to challenge? They can see it's dangerous. But they're prepared to take it on because they're so involved with their pressure...there are a load [of directors] that will [take risks] for the sake of the filming day, for the sake of completing the day.... I'm part of 'Mr. No'. The production manager is your backup on that, but you are on the floor on the day...I've stepped in many a time. (1996, p.27)

Don told of a terrible health and safety mistake that he witnessed during filming in Morocco, when a scene had been inadequately choreographed:

We were doing...the Bond film out there. I was on the second unit.... A horse went running across the bridge, there was an overturned jeep, these were local Moroccan horsemen, packed so tightly, racing over the bridge, that all the horses, nowhere for him to go but be pushed against the side of this wrecked jeep which had already been blown, and the metal took his leg off...we had an American super-paramedic with us in the desert, this guy had strapped him like you wouldn't believe.... Forget about packing the leg in ice and things like that, it was a case of saving the guy's life.... The airport wasn't too far away where we were, just flew him from there, obviously got flown to somewhere for special treatment. He lived, but it doesn't stop the filming going on. You carry on. (1996, p. 30)

In chapter four, Tim described a special effects-related accident involving explosives that nearly killed a technician during the principal photography of *The Crying Game* (1996, p. 15).

Short-term thinking about health and safety is fostered by at least two elements arising from the temporary nature of film units. Firstly, the focus of freelancers on the industry as a whole means individuals are discouraged from thinking too deeply about what occurs within a given unit. Perhaps it hardly seems worth bothering about health and safety practices and procedures for things that will only happen once, or just for an hour, a day or a week, especially since everyone on the unit knows they will be walking away shortly, never again to work under that particular set of circumstances.

Secondly, health and safety issues, including risk assessments, which have cost implications, and most do, are likely to be resisted purely on financial grounds, since such expenditure is unlikely to have been identified during the budgeting process in pre-production. Therefore, there will be no health and safety lines in the budget, and any expenditure on health and safety must be charged to other cost centres (leading to budget cuts for other departments on the unit) or health and safety expenditure will constitute an overspend.

That there are no health and safety officers on units speaks for itself - it is such a contentious, potentially costly and time consuming area that many producers prefer to ignore it.

5.1.2 SUMMARY: WORK IN A TEMPORARY ORGANIZATION

This section has suggested that working in temporary organizations creates a specific mindset in freelancers. Work is intense and the pressures on individuals to deliver are high, whatever their job. As far as freelancers are concerned, reflective practices such as benchmarking are of questionable benefit, because every unit is both so unique and so

short lived that there is no relevant learning to be had by considering the immediate past. Even learning from personal mistakes is perceived as being of limited value:

You have a horrible problem on one film, you think, 'Jesus, if I live through this, I'm never ever going to work in the film business again!' When you get to the end of the show, you think, 'God, I've really learned something on that. The next one will be so much easier.' Wrong! It's just another [different] problem on the next one. (Kay, 1996, p. 16)

Anything which contributes to improving individuals' immediate job performances is highly valued and actively pursued by freelance workers. Networking within and outside of the unit is considered essential, both for satisfactory job performance and to secure future employment, since recruitment practices in this sector are highly informal and absolutely dependent on personal networks.

Ed made a seemingly minor complaint about UK film crews:

It's very easy to take a group of people out on the street and they abuse the privilege of being a film crew. I don't know if you've ever been stopped in traffic by somebody in a yellow traffic suit, 'You can't go through there, we're filming.' And these kids don't seem to have mastered 'please' and 'thank you' and 'excuse me'.... Smokers who will put their cigarettes out on the nearest surface, or a street littered with paper cups or people cursing and swearing at 06.00 in the morning or [unit] drivers turning their engines over. All of that, I just cannot stand it, and the right they have is the divine right that comes with being part of a film crew, and it pushes buttons with me. (1997, pp. 34 - 35)

He interpreted these behaviours as an expression of British culture. Perhaps so, but it speaks even more of people who know they will not be, and cannot be, called to account. When tomorrow comes, they - literally - will be long gone. Within a matter of days or weeks the unit will cease to exist. Unit members have learned what they can get away with. Ultimately, management indifference to health and safety issues and to obligations

which may outlive the unit is an extreme expression of the same attitude – producers have learned where they can cut corners, and given the financial pressures on them, many do. Individuals are keen to make their mark on each film for all time, to take their credit and to be acknowledged for their expertise, which has been photographed and which will be available for evaluation for the foreseeable future. Bob put it like this, “Because it’s such a competitive world, everybody’s trying very hard, and everyone wants to be...noticed and to put their mark in whatever way they can on the film.... For the rest of the world to see.” (1993, p. 8). It is a matter of professional pride: “Part of their self-esteem comes with what they’re called [referring to job title]...it’s terribly important to everybody to get a screen credit...it’s quite often where on the roller their name comes [that people care about]” (Ed, 1997, p. 16). If achieving an effect that will ensure an individual’s reputation means pushing the health and safety boundaries of locations, stunts, schedules or special effects to the limits or beyond the limits set by law, perhaps capturing the moment on camera seems well worth the danger at the time, especially if direct health and safety risks are borne by others.

The circumstance of working in temporary organizations was referred to constantly, directly and implicitly, during interviews. Although it was an element of film production I was aware of and interested in before commencing fieldwork, I had no idea that it would prove to be so important in influencing almost every facet of organizational design and organizational behaviour.

5.2 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experience counts for just about everything in the film business. (Kay, 1996, p. 17)

The most powerful learning organization theme to emerge during coding was *learning is tied to action*. It is acknowledged as the principal way in which people learn and advance within film units.

5.2.1 ACTON LEARNING

One thing the film business really does teach you is that the only way you do anything is just by doing it. So you're scared. OK. Be scared, put it aside, and do it! (Sue, 1996, p. 35)

Today psychologists have joined the chorus. Many now define learning as changes in behaviour brought about by experience, with trial and error the primary mechanism at work.⁵ Like Dewey, they believe that the process is most effective when it is situated and grounded, linked closely with concrete activities and past experience.⁶ Unanchored ideas and concepts - techniques without a home - are difficult to grasp. They are far more likely to be understood when they are taught in familiar contexts, settings and environments. (Garvin, 2000, p. 92)

The most common way of learning on units is on-the-job training. 50% of Blair, Grey and Randle's (2001) sample gave "on the job training as their main source of initial 'training' in the industry." (p. 10). Their study also indicated that "crew members identified the people they worked with as the main source of information on new techniques; either through watching these people using techniques or being informed of them verbally. On the basis of this information they incorporated this knowledge into their own work through teaching themselves (47%)." (p. 10).

Reflecting on the experience of working on a high-budget USA-financed feature, Don spoke of the inspirational effect of working alongside stimulating colleagues:

All of a sudden, you're working with people you've seen on documentaries. These are people who are experts in their field, and you are there, in alongside them, so you raise your level to theirs. You raise your interest and level to slip in with them and I think everyone does that. My God, you've got a pretty click fast slick running sort of unit there. (1996, p. 45)

Like Sue, people working on film units believe that the best way to learn is to jump in at the deep end. Pam said, "I really don't know how I could be trained to be a production manager. You get your experience by doing the job." (1996, p. 23).

Ed estimates his ability to take on unfamiliar tasks, and counts on being able to learn on the hoof, under tremendous pressure. Formal learning may follow:

Some old lag phones you up and says, 'Can you do it?' 'Yeah, I can do that.' And on that film...I was working with D.B. and R.M., and it was the first film I'd seen scheduled using Movie Magic [industry scheduling software]. And it's, 'What is this?' D.B. says, 'It's Movie Magic. This is the future.' And it was some time after that that I bought a computer, bought Movie Magic, and forced myself to learn to use a computer and forced myself to learn word processing. And eventually M.B. and I paid for, in our own time, we went and did a Microsoft course to learn word-processing and transformed the call sheet. Transformed it! We trained ourselves, bought our own equipment, paid for our own training courses. I'm not special in that respect, everybody does that. (Ed, 1997, p. 23)

Don contrasted the reputation and employability of individuals who had been observed on units to learn by doing with people who had academic qualifications in aspects of film or cinema, but little experience of working on units:

People don't carry around bits of paper which say they can do things in this industry.... Even the camera department, which is the most technical department, most of those guys have just learnt it by being there long enough. They start as a clapper loader or they start as camera tea boy and they load the magazines. They load, put the board in, they learn about focusing...or the focus puller, if he's good enough, will teach them how to pull focus and then the focus puller wants to become the operator, and they'll practice him. It's amazing, really. Yes, there are the schools...where that stands you, I'm not quite sure, you know. (Don, 1996, pp.34 - 35)

Ann consciously looks for opportunities to learn while she works, through the kinds of deals she can set up. She tries to work with people she knows she can learn from:

There is a much stronger move towards co-producing.... The best [co-production deal] is with somebody...who has skills that I don't and yet I have skills that he doesn't. So it's very complimentary. (1993, p. 26)

While Jim expects to attend trade fairs, such as *The Television Show*, as a way of increasing his knowledge, and mentioned learning skills he anticipated he would need (such as touch typing, at the beginning of his career), he stressed the crucial importance of working on *freebie films* such as short films or on other low-budget projects, that extended his knowledge when he was starting out: "Most people learn their skills on the low-budget stuff. Because they [low-budget producers] can't afford to pay the going rate, they let people do it who aren't as experienced." (1993, p. 35).

Freelance individuals expect to learn enough on a series of contracts in a particular role, runner, for example, to be able to *break a grade*, and move up to the next level of work, which, in the case of a runner, might be third assistant director or production secretary, on a subsequent unit. Ann described the process:

When you're taken on, you're taken on in a certain capacity. Some people then are able to do more than would be nominally required, and therefore create their own niches and take on more than other people. And will be allowed and indeed encouraged to do that. But you would still be graded as a runner even if you'd been [acting up].... Assistant levels are always in the middle of moving grade, every job counts as another bit to move on into the next bit.... If people are moving through with the same employers, [those employers] can feel, because they know of your previous track record directly involved with them, that you can break a grade. (1993, pp 28 - 29)

When asked about on-the-job training, Ann said:

Only in terms of heads of department to assistants. Who literally are on-the-job training all the time, so you'll actively see people being taught what different things are.... Even within their own grades, a clapper loader is constantly being taught new things, and that's very active, in its truest form it's an apprenticeship training. And the craft grades are made up almost totally of apprenticeship training.... And in the craft grades you will see a lot of sons and fathers and families. (1993, p. 43)

Observing others and experimenting with new skills are typical ways of learning on units. When I asked Pam how people increase their own knowledge on units, she replied, "Watching other people. Having and keeping enthusiasm, willing to do whatever." (1996, p. 21). Bob explained how he learns by letting experienced colleagues do things "their way" while he watches, or by changing his own systems to try approaches which sound better to him:

I'm always interested in other people's ideas or ways they've done it, and if it sounds like it's going to work for the betterment of the film.... Let's say the art director has a way of doing something, like budgeting, I usually say to them if they've got a proved record, that if that's the way they want to do it and the figures all come out at the end, and you give us the sets on time, then you go ahead and do it that way. I like to be flexible. (1993, p. 17)

Bob is interested in accepting additional responsibilities which will enable him to learn more about what is going on in the unit:

As a production manager, you work with different people, sometimes they put a lot more on you than you might think you should have. I like to have a lot because I like to know all the aspects: to me, it has a bearing on how I can work. If I know everything. (1993, p. 19).

Chapter two has already suggested the importance of tacit knowledge to film units. Ed spoke about how his tacit knowledge and assumptions about production surfaced when he imported film production practices into television units:

In television drama production, the television studio system adapted itself to shooting on location not terribly well. When they tried to marry that with film production practice, companies would pull in freelance production managers who would arrive with the call sheet system which television crews weren't necessarily used to. They would balk at the idea of referring to a call sheet. They were used to a system where they were given a schedule at the beginning.... The schedule is three inches thick and told them what they'd be doing on the last day of filming. By the time you got to the second day of filming, people would be using it as a coffee mat. So you had people saying, 'Call [sheet]? What is a call sheet?' and then people say, 'I didn't get my call sheet last night!' and you say, 'The onus is on the individual to make sure they do.' And all of a sudden, these unwritten laws come to the surface.

There was then a struggle for the right way to do it, and there is no right way to do it. In retrospect, for me it was a useful process because you then question all the givens. We...have taken with us a television practice which I scoffed at because I was being defensive and everything that wasn't a call sheet was a waste of time...eventually we did actually all stand together at the border and shake hands. I know they're all using call sheets now, and they know that I always try to do a weekly schedule which is for heads of department, we've served paper that we agree that next week we're going to try and shoot the following and your department will provide the following facilities.... It's a great idea! People go, 'I thought we'd agreed that the car wasn't going to be blue.' 'That's right, we did agree that it wasn't blue. Sorry.' or 'Yes, it is going to be blue. Where were you?' I got that from Scottish television. (1997, pp. 18 - 19)

Ed and his associate, M.B., used the opportunity of working together on a unit to achieve specific learning outcomes:

I wanted to understand more about how the money works as a tool and, with M.B., we wanted to polish our [management] system and test it. We reckoned we had a system which appeared to work but this was going to be the test.... It was a

very useful exercise. I discovered that I probably understood more about the money tool than I thought, and we discovered a lot of pros and cons in the system that we've got. We proved that it is a good system. (1997, pp. 33 - 34)

Don *learned* his way into film and television production:

I was unemployed for eighteen months and I used to frequent a pub on a regular basis at lunch time. I met a couple of guys who were drivers in this business. They seemed to be having a whale of a time, driving around the world with these specialist vehicles. There was the appeal. That sounds like a good job.... Then I bumped into an old mate of mine at a party.... 'What are you doing?' 'I'm running a company that supplies vehicles to the film and TV industry, it's two guys in a room. You want a week's work?' I said, 'Yeah, I'll have a week's work.' Week's work, and I worked for that company driving all their specialist vehicles for another sixteen months...By being on that, coming into offices and getting to know the system...I checked on the ways of doing things and found the way in was to make the tea. Become a runner. To be the low-life. Pestered a production manager when I was on a film...and he promised me faithfully when he got his next job, I could be his runner. He stood good to his word, and about three months after the film finished he rang me and said he was doing a film at Twickenham Studios, I could be the runner. (1996, pp. 35 - 36)

Kay's strategy was similar:

I'd met a woman called Sarah Radclyffe because I was filling in for a friend at [company], temping there, and she offered me a job as her secretary on [television series]. I said I couldn't because I was going to [work for a publisher]. Luckily she rang me all the time I was at [publisher]. And thank God, because I was so bad at the job I'd been taken on to do there, I gave it a month and left.... I went to work for Sarah and the luck was that I was in with two exceptionally talented people at the beginning of their careers, so I did everything. I answered the phones, produced pop-promos, was a runner on pop-promos one week, a producer the

next, and got breaks, hung onto their coattails and got breaks a hell of a lot faster than I would have done if I hadn't been there. And my relationship with them both continued and I freelanced for them both all my way up and for a couple of other people, and then when I had my first child, or before, T. asked me if I wanted to come in-house here...and that's how it happened, that's five years ago. (1996, p. 18)

Pam learned her production skills at work, progressing from receptionist through production secretary, personal assistant, director's assistant and production assistant to the title she held at the time of her interview, production co-ordinator:

I started off in production companies in the West End doing commercials, as a receptionist. Within a month I became a producer's assistant and did a few more commercials with him. I decided I wanted to try television...and got a job as a production secretary on [a well known transatlantic television series]. Once I was doing [that], J.H. asked if I would become his personal assistant. I did, and as a result of working with him.... I began to be well known as somebody who worked well with Americans, who understood the American system and ways of working. So I became a director's assistant in feature films, people like S.S., M.M. and R.S. Then I got offered a job as a production assistant on a movie called [title] and whilst I was on that the co-ordinator left and I was thrown in at the deep end and asked to take over from her. That's how I got my break.(1996, p. 24)

Tim got into film through the more traditional route of becoming a trainee technician, and learned enough on various units to progress from colour grader through editor, assistant director, and eventually production manager - the title he held when I interviewed him:

I did National Service. Then I worked in the City. Ran a mail order company.... My best friend was an assistant editor [at Pinewood]. When the mail order business didn't work, I decided I'd try to join him.... I tried to get on various films as an assistant editor. Couldn't. Then went to Technicolour and got a union ticket. Trainee colour grader. Then went to documentaries as an editor. Then AD

[assistant director]. Then AD on films. So it's a very traditional route through. In terms of education in the film business, I've had none.... It was good going to Technicolour first...to handle film and to work in cutting rooms right at the beginning was good. (1996, pp. 16 - 17)

Pam explained how she learned about shipping, and reflected on learning to manage her managers:

It was my first major film as a co-ordinator, and I had to learn about shipping. I had no concept of it at all, was literally thrown into it, and learnt a lot as a result. Each co-ordinator has their own systems and I had to make my own system gleaned from information I could find from other people.... The big lesson I learned was, make sure you keep everything on file, not to allow anything to slip, and to cover yourself for every aspect. Send out millions of memos, bombard people with paperwork, frankly.... There were several other reasons why I would do things differently [now], but you can only do that with the knowledge you've gained over the years.... As you get more and more experienced you become more and more confident. That confidence stays with you, [and enables] you to voice your requirements and your needs to your production manager. Sometimes you may have a production manager who is willing to hear, to listen. Other times you don't. When you come across a production manager who isn't willing to listen, you do have to be quite pushy. Or you say, 'Well, fine, I'll step back on this one.' I try not to rock the boat. Because it leaves an unpleasant flavour. You really don't want to do that, because the job is very hard as it is, without having extraneous problems making it harder. (1996, pp. 27 - 28)

Chapter six explores notions of *novice to expert* progression in film units by comparison with another experientially-based profession – nursing (Benner, 1984).

The only people labelled *learners* on units are those working under the job description of *trainee* within a department:

Various departments, particularly sound, the camera, the art department, sometimes the production [office] will agree to take on a trainee. We get lots and lots of CVs sent in, people desperate to get into the film industry, who are willing to do whatever. We read their CVs and ascertain which areas they might like to get involved in and put them there. The union also have a facility for trainees [FT2].
(Pam, 1996, p. 22)

Synopsis: Action Learning

To freelances making features, it is commonplace that learning is tied to action. Any other kind of learning is considered dubious. Learning in context, not in theory, is key to learning in film units. Learning is a hugely public activity within units, whereby learners are witnessed learning by the entire unit. People also learn with others, in groups, particularly SPWGs. Freelances in film production know what you learned, who you learned it from, where you learned it, when and why. Individuals with ambition understand that they have to target the next job title they intend to hold and learn that job inside out while actually doing a different, lower status job. People routinely claim to have greater skills or expertise than they actually do, having estimated that they can adequately fill the gap with immediate, rapid, on-the-job learning. Highly experienced freelances learn by observing how other people do things, perhaps in settings other than film units, and modify their own approaches to incorporate best practice. Ed and M.B. actually used the opportunity of working together on a unit to try out a new approach they were developing: they planned and conducted a learning experiment, and evaluated it.

5.2.2 PROBLEM SOLVING

Any given organization represents answers to a set of questions or solutions to a set of problems. (Argyris and Schön, 1978, p. 13)

Freelances on film units are explicit problem solvers:

Basically, the job is just problems, that's what the job is, the problems and the solving of them. (Don, 1997, p. 4)

Ann (1996, p. 5) thought the same.

People working on units see the particular problems inherent in making feature films as principal attractions of their jobs. Ed wants to become a producer mainly so that he can have more exciting problems to solve:

People are encouraging me to develop towards producing and mentally there are more interesting, more satisfying challenges in dealing at that level of problem solving and day-to-day fire fighting. (1997, p. 34)

A number of participants mentioned how much they enjoyed the intellectual challenges inherent in their jobs:

Juggling with a huge amount of balls.... That's the exciting part of co-ordinating, making all this stuff happen, and happen smoothly. And when it all changes, not dropping any balls. (Sue, 1996, pp. 27 - 28)

What I like about filming, every film is different, and you're learning something different from it, from every one. You learn how not to do the next one, or how to do the next one, or, you know, [being challenged by] different problems. (Bob, 1993, p. 26)

Sue spoke about rising to the challenge of action learning on film units in the context of solving a transport problem:

Finding an answer to something that you've never come across before.... It's also having to make things work. It's really exciting, this part. I was once in Hamburg and the German production manager had gotten all the vehicles, all the transport like the winnebagos [these are used as mobile changing rooms] and make-up trucks. We weren't going to take transport with us. We got there, and the winnebago was a camper van, and the make-up van was a camper van with a

mirror in it. We were shooting the next day, and there was this amazing panic: we could not possibly make this work. The producer said to me, 'Sue, you're going to have to get the transport over here, it's got to be here by tomorrow morning.' So I called the transport company [in England] and we figured out a way of doing it..... I had to phone up the ferry, who we didn't have an account with, who didn't know us from Adam, and persuade them that they were going to take all these vehicles, I had to find a cargo ferry that went at the right time and so, from Hamburg, I had the transport company on one ear, they were getting all their guys in and getting them on the road as I was trying to persuade the ferry company to get them across the water. And that was just such a buzz! It's that kind of thing in films that keeps me coming back. It's exciting to do stuff like that. And in the end we put in on a credit card, like, 'OK, who's going to give up their [personal] credit card?' The only one to put £1,500 worth of ferry fees on it. And they did it! (1996, pp. 6 - 7)

Kay gave an example of a problem which slipped through various levels of unit hierarchy, and required an expensive solution:

There's a major problem in every budget line item. Increasingly problems arise with clearance of various things. In a film recently, the designer decided that for the opening sequence, where the lead character is seated in a chair, a chair he found in a book of chair pictures was the chair that he wanted to do, so he copied said chair. It just so happened that this chair was designed by Mies van der Rohe or one of those guys, and an injunction was put on the film because they hadn't cleared the copyright. The detailing and the paperwork, there's all that side of it that has to go alongside the creative process, and that's incredibly important....

It was the distributor's problem because they'd bought the rights to distribute it in this country and the injunction was taken out against them.... Say if it hadn't gone that far, it would have been the producer's problem because they are bound to deliver a product that is clear of any of those kinds of problems. Beyond that, then it's the problem of the person in the art department who should have been doing the clearances, and it's the problem of the production company because

there wasn't anyone constantly being vigilant about it.... [LL: How was it solved?] Payoff..... They stopped the film from being injuncted but they obviously didn't make the profit they anticipated...because they had to pay out a stonking amount to allow the film to be released. (1996, p. 4)

Sue mentioned increasing her own knowledge so that she could avoid unwittingly creating problems through ignorance of specialist requirements within the unit:

You increase your knowledge on every film because of the set of problems you're dealing with and the requirements that [each] film will need are different.... You learn more [with] every film. I know quite a lot about camera equipment. But I put a lot of effort into making sure I understand what I'm dealing with because it's useless negotiating a truck for camera equipment when you have no concept of the size or the weight or the requirements which that [particular] camera equipment needs to work well for that department. You're constantly finding out more about how each department works so that you can do your job better. I spend a lot of time talking to Kodak, understanding the processing of film so that when there's a problem with the rushes, I have some understanding of where the potential problem could be. Is it a magazine fault, is it something to do with the batch of film that they're using, is it a lab problem? *The more you can teach yourself about all these different things , about the way it works, the better you can do your job* [italic added], because you don't waste time....I try and find out as much as I can about everybody's job, how it works and how the equipment works and what they need and why they need it. And that takes time.... A lot of people in production have spent very little time on the floor and so don't have a really good knowledge of the way the floor works, which is a dreadful weakness when you're making decisions about how and why it should run, if you don't really understand what people need when they're on the floor, where they're actually filming. (1996, pp. 19 - 21)

Synopsis: Problem Solving

Problem solving is closely related to action learning. Freelance contract workers on units relish urgent, complicated problems that bring an element of excitement and fun into standard days and standard routines, and provide opportunities for challenging, rapid learning. On a more mundane level, as Don says, everyone's job is to identify and solve the set of problems for which they have personal responsibility. Kay has pointed out that there are potential problems in every budget line: most of these are predicted during pre-production and headed off; the remainder are dealt with on a fire fighting basis. As with the incident concerning the chair, which had been replicated without copyright permissions or fees, a problem mishandled can have expensive or even devastating consequences. Ann mentioned the pressure of keeping on top of problems during production:

You're constantly trying to redress problems as they happen and make sure they don't happen later on, and analyse why they did [occur] and nip things in the bud.... Because they can't be allowed to corrupt through. (1993, p. 48)

Problem solving skills are very important in every aspect of the unit's work, and people are expected to take the initiative at every level in solving what problems they can. Ed accepts that there are things the production office does not need to know, especially when it comes to problems on the floor:

Involved parts communicate without us [the production office] being there. It's organic. That's the great thing. You only see production office at lunch time or at the end of the day; the people come forth, it must be time to go home, they've turned up. Because there have been a dozen problems that afternoon that have been solved [on the floor]. 'Do it.' 'No.' 'OK' 'Right.' 'We won't shoot that.' 'Forget it, we won't use that. We'll go over here instead.' Production office know nothing about it.... Actually don't need to. (1997, p. 29)

Interest in learning through problem solving, particularly in group contexts, is growing. Dillenbourg et al (1994), cited in Kumar (1996, p.1), “identifies three different theories of learning that could be employed in collaborative learning systems:

1. socio-constructivist theory
2. socio-cultural theory
3. shared cognition theory”

Kumar (1996) says of shared cognition, “By linking together specific contexts and knowledge to be learned, peers learn conditions under which the knowledge should be applied.... collaboration is viewed as a process of building and maintaining a shared conception of a problem, thus ensuring a natural learning environment.” (p. 2). These are ideas that map well onto problem solving attitudes and practices in UK film units.

5.2.3 COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

This section considers the ways in which unit members learn from their own experiences, and whether or not learning for these contract workers takes place outside of feature film units.

Reflective Practice

I don’t sit down and make notes about what I’ve gleaned.... I just hope I remember it..... I’m not sure that I always do, no. (Tim, 1996, p. 19).

Tim’s appraisal of his learning provides a useful context for the following extract in which Garvin (2000, p. 99) quotes Hirschmann (*Profit from the Learning Curve*) on the necessity of structuring reflective practice:

Learning from experience is an active process. Improvements must be carefully and consciously managed. There is nothing automatic about the resulting gains, and ‘merely expecting progress does not bring it about.’³¹

In speaking of how the experiences of a unit are assessed after the completion of a film, Jim said:

Some people take a stab at it. Ann once did the budget in retrospect of [film], just to see what she'd estimated and what actually happened. But that was just out of interest, she doesn't do it on everything.... I sometimes come away thinking, 'Well, that's something I've done now, that I know about.' I never sit down and think, 'This is what I learned!', but I do come away with the feeling that I've conquered something. When I did [film], I felt that freighting stuff around the world would never be a problem for me again.... I came away from it confident that I could move a unit around the world. (1993, pp. 43 - 44)

Ann places limited value on assessing projects in depth after they are completed. As far as she is concerned, each film presents a unique set of challenges which are unlikely to be replicated:

You think, 'I'll never, never make this particular mistake again, there must be a way around that.' Then you have a whole different set of circumstances so you.... The only time that I've really seen it properly was when we used to go through budgets, because budgets are a sort of estimate, and we used to take an actual at the end and try and work out how the costs really...it's very rarely done, that the actuals are broken away from the originals and kept on record as being actual costs. We did start doing it as a sort of study, because it was helpful. Sort of helpful. But then, because every project was different.... The post mortems, if there are any, tend to be held there and then. By the end of the project most people are going to go away and flop or be ill. There's a level beyond which interest in the project slumps because everyone is so tired.... There are sort of overviews...there is received information about how people worked, and who worked, and where there were any problem areas.... But it's not formalised in any way.... You always hope that you're never going to be caught out again, but there's some awful thing about the vagaries of production which means that you're not caught out in that particular thing but then you have a complete different set of things and you're

caught out on that.... There's always a variance, it's always so different, but there's always something that's going to catch you, you can never quite perfect it.... Which is probably one of the nicest things about it, in a way, because you're always on your toes, you're always frightened. (1993, pp. 48 - 49)

Don, like Ann, is aware that units are unique, and that there is no one way of doing things. This extract gives an example of Don's interest in reflecting on units' performances as part of his strategy to become a production manager:

I assess a lot in the running of the production. If I do want to be a production manager one day, how would I have done things? I look back, and I look at incidents or times or costs or problems that occurred along the way. Each show is so different. There's no two the same. Because people are never the same. Crews are never the same. Individuals run their departments separately each time. There's not one set system...just working with so many hundreds of people throughout a year. (1996, p. 38)

Sue draws on learning from previous temporary organizations:

If I've worked with someone before, we'll say, 'Oh, we did it like that on [a previous film].' Tim I work with a lot, I did *The Crying Game* with him. Our discussions on the ways we've done something before and, if it worked really well, we could do similar to that [on this occasion] or if we didn't like the way it worked, well, 'Shall we try it another way?'.... I have three, four people that I could work with on a regular basis, but, like with Tim, I might work with him on a film every two years. (1996, p. 28)

Ed consolidates the positive aspects of his experiences in order to capitalise on his learning. He gave a marvellous example of learning a budgeting technique on a previous unit and subsequently networking with the producer from that film, who acted as a mentor to consolidate Ed's new financial skills. Then, rehearsing his learning, Ed produced an improved budget for the unit he had moved on to:

You're about to go on to another [film], and you think, 'I know what I'll do this time. I will do' I've just done a budget for a low budget co-production. I was given a budget from one of their financing bodies, and I said to the guy, 'I'll need a week.' From absolutely the ground up, I constructed an entirely new budget using the information they'd given me, on the basis of the budget which the producer on [his previous unit] had given me, because the mechanics of his budget software, so clever. I phoned him up and said, 'How do I do that?' and got various lectures from him on how to do this and to do that.... While we were fire fighting on [his previous unit] I was aware that I was being shown how to do these things, and I just used that bucket of water that day. But it was afterwards I thought, 'Next time I do that...' (1997, p. 30)

When he considered the development of his career as a location manager, Don made a direct link between learning to spend well in spite of constant pressure to reduce costs and his professional success:

Everybody slaps you on the back, the filming's great. 'Well done, Don.' All back to the office, and the accountant says, 'Look how much you spent!' I said, 'Yeah, but we got it.' 'We can't afford [that much].' I said, 'Sorry, go and see them down there, because they were slapping me on the back just a minute ago. You can't suddenly change it.' I did one, 'Don, I didn't realise it cost THAT much!' he said. You can't please everybody all the time.... Listen, if that camera crew turns up and they can't shoot, then you've got problems. That's a lot of money. All the time that crew's running, all the time those trucks, especially when moving around London...teams of people, the bagged-off meters and securing yellow lines and keeping an eye on the traffic.... It's only a twelve hour day you're dealing with. The time soon runs out. The way film schedules are put together, you've just got to keep moving forward. The moment you stop moving forward, it costs the company a load of money. I've always been a great believer in spending well to achieve the aim, and it's always paid off.... I don't think I've ever been under-budget. Not for the want of trying, but it [location managing] demands so much....

People just see what your achievements are, or whatever the CV reads and yeah, there's some good stuff in there. Maybe if I'd held back here, there and whatever, maybe I wouldn't have achieved that. Maybe I wouldn't have lasted. (1997, p. 10)

Learning from personal mistakes was an important theme to emerge during interviews.

Bob said,

When you've trusted people to do something and they haven't and it's become...a major disaster...what you do is, when you get the next production, you might sit down and go through, if there's a foreseeable problem that you've already encountered on another production, you can say to the producer,...'[On] this particular script, sounds like we could get into these kinds of problems.' (1993, p. 22)

Don talked about a mistake that could have terminated his career, and about what he learned:

I punched out a production designer on a location, in front of the entire crew. And swore never to do it again. Not just to a designer, but to any individual. There's a way of dealing with things other than.... That was the second job I'd ever done as location manager. It's a fine line to try and get someone to respect your position, respect your responsibilities. I hadn't quite cracked it at that stage, and I took the easy option. Whereas experience now tells me there's no need for that. I can box a lot cleverer than that now. That's the main regret because things like that in this industry just don't go down well at all. It soon carries in this industry. People still remember. Fortunately it didn't do my career any harm. It could have done. Big, big, big lesson. (1996, p. 39)

Kay spoke of trying not to replicate a mistake:

We have a production manual that we issue on every production and it's something that I'll go back and look over [it] and think.... Which is the most formal way of doing it. The rest is thinking, 'It wasn't so great, the way we set up

x, y and z,' and then discussing it with various other people for whom it's relevant, and getting their input. We were just thinking of overcoming a union problem in America by working out a certain route for structuring the company of a film and I had this conversation yesterday with our head of business affairs, and I was saying, 'If we structure this the same way as we structured [a previous film], which we structured to get around the union problem, we actually got unionised on [that film]. So let's learn from that experience and say this isn't the right route.'... It's an informal process as well. And it's something that takes place in management meetings and is minuted. (1996, pp. 20 - 21)

Kay works for a mini-major, and it is notable that her employer has systems in place which support reflective practice, such as the standard issuing of production manuals.

Ed reflected on his learning over the previous few years, and knew that it had changed him as a person:

I am better at my job than I used to be.... I wouldn't employ the me of four years ago. I'm probably being hard on myself but I'm very conscious of having improved in my assessment and decision making [abilities]. With confidence comes kindness. People tend to reach a point in this business when you're pushed into a situation...you're constantly being pushed to the edge. If you're confident at that edge [fine], when you're not confident, that's a nightmare. (1997, p. 15)

Learning outside the unit

Section 5.4.2 below, the section on networking with external individuals and organizations, describes what to people in the film world is the most common and acceptable way of learning outside of the unit: talking informally on a one-to-one basis or with groups of specialists. This section examines more formal mechanisms for learning.

Blair, Grey and Randle (2001) have pointed out that the current workforce in UK film is middle aged, and that a significant number of them will have been trained through broadcasters' training programmes which have now been cut back (p. 10).

There are various formal mechanisms for learning available to freelances who work in film production, such as short courses and film school. However, formal learning is not always particularly well respected on film units, as some consider experiential learning the only authentic way to gain knowledge:

I'm sure there are [training opportunities between productions], like Beaconsfield Film School...and BECTU have courses every now and again.... Unfortunately they all come out thinking they can be Steven Spielberg after they've been to those.... It's wonderful that they do it [undertake formal learning] because they give them quite a wide grounding, but, I'm going to be rude here, it's the arrogance of youth that does it. It's not so much that they have unreal expectations, it's that they think they know it all when they leave film school. [Pam, 1996, pp. 22 - 23]

Citing Davenport and Prusak (1998), Starkey and Madan (2001) have suggested that firms' interest in knowledge is purely instrumental:

Knowledge here is seen as a source of firm competitive advantage and needs to be considered in the context of business strategy.

Firms are interested in the application of knowledge rather than knowledge for its own sake. 'What makes knowledge valuable to organizations is ultimately the ability to make better decisions and action taken on the basis of knowledge. If knowledge doesn't improve decision making, then what's the point?' (p. S6)

Freelances in film production would agree.

A number of participants mentioned courses, Bob (1993, p. 20) for example:

People go to film school. The camera people, they'll go off and maybe try and get into a film school.... And directors. There's very little [formal education or training] for producers and production people. It's a shame. There could be more.

I don't know how one would monitor it or who would finance it. You read *Screen International*; you get the big adverts [for seminars]: how people raise money, how people do co-productions, special low-budget seminars...

Tim (1996, p. 15) and Ed (1997, p. 23) said the same.

Ann mentioned short courses: "The National Film and TV School has endless short courses. Prominent Features has a whole little training scheme which they fund." (1993, p. 44).

Don intends to organise some training for himself. He is interested in becoming accredited in the area of health and safety: "The training I want to take in between filming would be this health and safety thing, so that would be the way I would be learning." (1996, p. 35). As section 5.1.1 has demonstrated, Don wants the increased status and power that he believes a health and safety qualification will bring.

Freelance workers are expected to organise their own training, to pay for it, and to undertake it on their own time, i.e. between films. When asked if training was ever provided for him, Don told me, "You're freelance, you're an individual, you don't work for anybody. Nobody's prepared to put you through a course." (1996, p. 35). Although Kay encourages freelancers to develop in ways that she estimates will prove useful to her, she draws the line at paying for their training: "No, absolutely not!" [LL: You just tell them [a technical change is] coming, get ready!] "Yes, and frankly, they should know. They're freelancers, their speciality, not mine." (1996, p. 10).

The time pressures caused by the timing and pace of work on film units can make identifying time for formal training a problem. Ed finds it difficult to book a short course: "You don't know when your next job is going to happen, so it would be very difficult to say in March you're going to go on a...course, because you don't know [if you will be working or not]." (1977, p. 25).

Sometimes self-directed learning is more a question of *did he jump, or was he pushed?*

Kay described her attempt to develop editors so that she can continue to employ them:

In the editing department, there are still some people out there who don't want to cut digitally.... I continually say to people, 'We might want you to cut digitally, so for Christ's sake, just go off and do yourself a small course while you're not working, so you're familiar with it.'.... God, because otherwise you're going to end up with a pot of people that aren't useable. (1996, p. 10)

In terms of learning between productions, Ann said:

People are often around for the shoots...but then have no understanding of how it's all finished.... We would actually say, 'Why don't you go to the lab? Why don't you go to Kodak?' And Kodak run workshops, there are quite a lot of workshops for people...which are external, which are run by larger companies. The newer editing methods are always workshop taught. *Women in Film* has a lot of workshops. PACT has a lot of workshops. (1993, p. 44)

Bob spends time learning about new technology:

I like to look at the new equipment and new ways of doing things. Funnily enough, it's the technicians [who] are very wary of new technology. Like the editors, that's a prime example. Editors are very wary of the new equipment [for digital editing], it's like going back to the industrial revolution, they're worried about manpower being overtaken by machines. In the very near future it's going to be. You're going to need fewer editors because it's going to be a lot more compact to do, less labour intensive, it's all on video and on digital tape. (1993, p. 10)

He is unlikely to pay to learn, and mentioned that he prefers to learn when he is in work:

I sometimes go to the camera houses and the editing facilities and studios and labs, but usually I try and do that within whatever film I'm on [as opposed to between films] because of cost and because I can do two things at once. I can be doing deals and learning. (Bob, 1993, p. 19)

Synopsis: Commitment to Learning

Reflective practice only takes place in a limited way within film units. Unusual individuals such as Ann and Kay may occasionally compare actual events and out-turns against earlier budgets, but such an evaluation is not part of a holistic appraisal. Don thinks about how he would have handled specific issues if he had been the production manager on previous films as a way of thinking himself into that role in the future. However, no one working on a film unit has the theoretical knowledge or the time to invest in the cycle of gestalt review, foreword planning, monitoring and assessment that reflective practice requires. There is no obvious organizational benefit to discrete temporary organizations in learning outputs for the future, because they have no future. Available time in units is directed towards achieving excellence on the current film.

Specific mistakes are remembered, and are unlikely to be repeated. People are also aware of having learned specific skills on particular units, although sometimes this realisation came after the fact. Units are not just technical systems, though, and Don reflects on unit politics in describing how he has learned to deal with paradox by understanding what is really important to his managers and what he can afford to ignore: he has learned to spend well in order to achieve his objectives because he would rather have a reputation as a successful location manager who is not known to pinch pennies, than as a cost-controlling failure.

Learning outside of the unit, other than through networking, discussed below, is not greatly respected or understood by freelances. Although some participants mentioned that short courses had been useful, especially in connection with computing, the face-to-face short course format is difficult for freelance workers to commit to, since offers of work take precedence over training arrangements.

5.2.4 SUMMARY: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Although in certain important respects experiential learning is vital to film units, in other ways it is marginalised. This chapter (and chapters three and four) have revealed that, in terms of learning organization theory, film units behaviours exhibit an inversion of premises in important respects.

The ability to solve problems quickly and resourcefully is highly valued in units, and often requires sophisticated individual and group learning. Individuals at every level in the organization are expected to take the initiative in solving problems, because decision making is routinely pushed down to the lowest possible level.

Nevertheless, learning is not identified as an important activity by unit managers. There is no paid training or paid time for learning. Formal qualifications are not required or recognised in pay structures or in any other way. Formal apprenticeship schemes are limited. Freelances are expected to organise and pay for their own training. Reflective practice is almost unknown, with activities such as benchmarking considered irrelevant.

The stance on learning in this setting of temporary organizations is somewhat oppositional to learning organization theory. For example, learning organization theory assumes that knowledge is primarily theoretical and must be made practical. In film units, theory is of no interest and practical outcomes are paramount. Unlike learning organization theory, which posits a top down pressure for learning, the pressure for learning in units is bottom up. If individuals do not have the requisite skills or knowledge, they know they will be unemployable. Freelances on the floor are desperate to learn during working time (by doing two things at once), as action learning is perceived as the only route to advancement; whereas management are only interested in learning in so far as it enables a unit to meet immediate goals. I once asked a production manager if he ever gathered an entire unit together at the end of principal photography to discuss what had gone well and

what could be improved on future units. “What?” he asked, “And pay everybody for an extra half day? Not bloody likely!” (Jim, personal communication, 1992).

David Garvin’s (2000) definition of a learning organization “A learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, interpreting, transferring, and retaining knowledge, and at purposefully modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights.” (p. 11) almost fits film units. Certainly they create, acquire, interpret and transfer some kinds of knowledge, using it purposefully to modify individual and unit behaviour. However, knowledge cannot be retained within a temporary organization. Knowledge is retained by individuals within the unit, and embedded in industry-wide systems and practices. As freelances move from unit to unit their tacit and explicit knowledge transfers with them to the benefit of their new employer, and their colleagues.

5.3 EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

It sounds flash, but we always used to be sitting around, there were lots of us who were going up for the same job. Now there are lots of jobs and they only want one or two individuals to do it. And it’s great! And I’m fortunate, I’m balancing it nicely at the moment. Who you know. Who knows you, and who you know. (Don, 1996, p. 36)

Participants agreed that recruitment was a key process for units, possibly the key process. Individuals are hired for their integrity, their technical abilities, their flair for working well in teams, and in order to perpetuate long-standing working relationships which create oases of certainty in an otherwise highly unstable and volatile environment. Interestingly, Caves (2000) suggests that “*transaction specific assets*” by which he means “compatible physical facilities, knowledge of the particulars of each others’ needs, and other such uniting factors” (p. 96) are not significant considerations in Hollywood when units are being formed. These are not the only factors influencing UK recruitment decisions, but they are very important. As Daskalaki & Blair (2002) point out, “The film industry

provides a particularly extreme case of networking, demonstrating the importance of informal means of learning of and getting, jobs.” (p. 6).

5.3.1 SETTING THE TONE

The way the unit works is normally a reflection on the director or the director of photography or the people who are driving it. (Tim, 1996, p. 4)

People are recruited for units in a pattern of ripples or circles. Usually the producer comes on board first: “It’s the way the system works. The producer is making the film. He’s hired the director. And it spreads out from there.” (Ed, 1997, p. 16). The producer is teamed up with a director: “You’re putting a producer with a director: is that dynamic going to work or not? It’s very dangerous if it doesn’t.... You’re hiring people to take control of \$20m. That’s a huge risk. On an interview.” (Kay, 1996, p. 15). Pam spoke of the impact a director could have:

[He] was so good with the crew. So aware of what they did and who they were. He always had the time of day for them. His attitude was, you do not work the crew excessive hours because you don’t get back what you need from them. So he was always there for them. I’d never seen this happen in a long, long time. And the crew. The loyalty they showed him, they would have walked over hot coals for him. They would have died for him. (Pam, 1996, p. 8)

Marrying up ways of working and the personalities of key unit figures is vital to the success of temporary organizations:

So much, SO much of the way these companies [film units] actually operate is to do with personality clashes, and that’s to do with every company.... This can throw the structure out the window. Especially [between] the producer and director. And then if you get more than one producer, well, you’re into a whole other thing. (Jim, 1993, p. 55)

Heads of department too influence the mood of the unit, which originates from the attitudes, values and behaviour of senior managers:

It comes down from the top. On a really happy movie you'll inevitably find that management have been the reason why, because they've projected a happy atmosphere. On *Four Weddings and a Funeral* the same thing happened. You had a producer who was fun and jolly, a director who was similar, and that crept all the way down.... In individual departments, it could be your own head of department who does that, you can be cocooned in your little happy world; the rest of the crew are screaming and pulling their hair out, but you're quite happy. (Pam, 1996, pp. 28 - 29)

Exactly who makes which recruitment decisions varies from unit to unit. Jim explained:

It's open to negotiation, depending on how much experience people have had and so on. With new producers it certainly happens that the production manager will bring everybody on board, with new producers and directors. With people with a lot more experience, [they] would know who they want. On [film], you can see it when you go in there. J.B., who is producing it, is producing the financial side of it, and L.B. [the production manager] is crewing up totally. Everybody there is L.B.'s. (1993, pp. 8 - 9)

Generally, though, the producer will recruit production office personnel, the production manager and production co-ordinator, for example; while the director will select the heads of department, the director of photography, the production designer and so forth. These managers are then normally responsible for recruiting their own teams, and they select like-minded people. An ethos, expressed through such hiring practices, spreads like a ripple through the organization. Huw, a head of department, said of two very different producers,

The people who'd work on a S.R. film are more committed to cinema, whereas people who work on a B.E. film would call it 'the film game'. They're only interested for the money they get out of it.... I don't think S.R. would hire people

that.... What she does is, she hires me. She knows I'll hire people who think like me. Which of course I would. (1996, pp. 16 - 17)

Bob, a production manager, is interested in fostering a creative approach at every level throughout his units, and hires accordingly:

I like to involve people. I think it's important that they're involved creatively; someone can be creatively involved in a very small way, but that they have a creative thought, even if they're a driver, that they can talk to actors and be creative. (1993, p. 11)

When asked to give an example of a unit with its own values, Jim said,

I know what working with Ann is like, because I know the sort of people she employs.... The employer, whoever that ends up being, whoever brings the people, B.E. [a producer] sets a tone on his, which is wanting to screw you into the ground, and there's no love lost: it's a real jungle. Ann always seems to get people that are competent but also very good at team work, so they're going in for a nice experience as well as making the film. Working Title is very much like that, they're quite good at teamwork.... That's all just personality and individuals who are doing the hiring and firing.... You very quickly get a sense of what sort of attitude there is on a production...because it's set. The tone is set by the people who employ you...people have reputations so you know from their reputation what they're going to be like. Different production managers have different reputations for different things. There's already a buzz around about what certain people are like so you know what their productions are like. But, as in how you ever find out, you find out through experience. You sure find out. You make a mistake and people either bollock you, or they don't. (1993, pp. 46 - 47)

He described how a shared sense of vision is created on units:

From the director hiring people. The director will interview and look at people's work and decide if they are heading in the same direction that she wants to go in....

If the director hasn't got a clear vision of what's going on - it just goes to hell.... [Jim described directors with vision as normally harder to work for than jobbing directors, but] rewarding. It's what you're there for.... It doesn't matter if it's harder, as long as it's right. (Jim, 1993, pp. 51 - 53)

5.3.2 WORK GROUPS AND SEMI-PERMANENT WORK GROUPS

At [mini-major] it just makes me laugh. You go in there and you think, 'God, if you ever worked under pressure, if you ever worked in the real world, you'd be scared!'.... When you're putting a team together from scratch and nobody knows each other, then the pressure's really on. But when [mini-major] get their friends to do it, and they're all more tolerant of fuck-ups and stuff like that, because they're all having a good laugh and a very matey time. (Jim, 1993, p. 11)

There seem to be two categories of work groups. There are groups of individuals and firms that work together well and enjoy working together, but which are not bonded as an alliance. They may be scattered across various departments within the unit, or involved in the supply of goods or services to it. Then there are semi-permanent work groups (SPWGs) (Daskalaki & Blair, 2002), which share a department or trade, electricians, for example, or carpenters. They operate as a formal group. Don's parking and security team, discussed below in 5.3.6, is an example of a SPWG. Both types of group, which move from unit to unit, are important.

SPWGs provide a simulacrum of continuity of employment for individuals working on a series of very short term contracts. They create a degree of stability and familiarity, reducing the number of unknown factors to be dealt with in each temporary organization. Individuals in such groups have established useful ways of working together over a period of years, and can swing into immediate, effective action, which is essential on units. As Daskalaki and Blair (2002), who write about UK SPWGs in film, explain, "In this uncertain and fluid type of environment one important means of passing on relevant

knowledge is through more stable interpersonal relationships, and often these fall within the context of a work group.” (p. 6). In their view, “learning is the outcome of collective problem-solving accumulated during the repeated interactions of the team members in previous collaborations. As a result, interaction in a SPWG leaves behind a ‘transformed network’ as a result of the activity” (p. 10). The next unit the SPWG works on thereby benefits from its learning on the previous one.

There is a history of family firms in the UK entertainment industry stretching back to at least the 19th century (Davis, 2000, pp. 241 - 242), and it is still possible to identify family groupings working on film units nowadays, particularly in craft areas such as lighting and carpentry. SPWGs at the beginning of the 21st century could be thought of as *work families*, maintaining a continuity of function from 19th century family firms to the present: “Kinship networks sustained the exploitation of much human and investment capital and kept a combination of key personnel consistently together.” (Davis, 2000, p. 242). According to Daskalaki and Blair (2002):

Teams are, in the instance of ‘producing knowledge’, coming together to share and reproduce what they have assimilated and accumulated during their previous common experiences as well as temporary separations. In the process of their collaboration, they are not only sharing and reproducing but they also create new knowledge embedded and situated in the socio-technical ‘spaces’ in which they co-exist. A film production, we suggest, in this case, becomes a learning episode for the members of the team as well as an opportunity for them to enhance their ability as collaborators in future projects. (pp. 1 - 2)

Participants mentioned the importance of carrying people over from one production to the next again and again, and other research into employment practices in UK film units supports this. In their study of a UK film production that was tracked over the course of a year, Blair, Grey and Randle (2001) found that jobs came through networking: 56% of the crew heard about their first job through a friend or relative, and “half of the sample (50%) actually got that job in the film or television industry by a recommendation.” (p. 8). In

terms of their case study film, "no crew member responded that they got the job through an interview process" (p. 9), with 50% saying they had been "invited by someone on the crew to work with them" (p. 9). "A further 29% got the job through 'recommendation'." (p. 9).

Bob, a production manager, gets his people in where he can, working around the producer and the director. He is constantly being made aware of new people, but prefers to work with familiar faces:

Agents are another source [of information] who, as soon as they know you've got a production, you'll get lists of CVs, there's no shortage of that kind of information and seeing who is around and what they can do because you can get videos, agents have video show reels, tape reels for music, etcetera. [LL: So partly you're going out, but once the word is out that you're doing something, it's coming in?]..... I would say it comes in more than us going out. I have the people I like to use and if a director or producer doesn't have somebody in whatever grades, I'll put forward those people, if I think they're right. (1993, p. 8)

Huw (1996, p. 6), Jim (1993, p. 27), Sue (1996, p. 3), Tim (1996, p. 7), Ann (1993, p. 23) and Ed (1997, p. 2) all made the same point.

If a low budget unit is being set up with poor terms and condition, a concern for managers is that they may not be able to recruit their usual SPWG. A head of department told me: "I have trouble getting a crew together if [the production manager] says it's six-day weeks." (Huw, 1996, p. 2).

5.3.3 SUPPLIERS AND SUB-CONTRACTORS

It actually works like a wheel, you have the core of the production which is the director, the production office, you get the sense that it radiates outwards and

everybody is subcontracting to somebody else so at the other end of the scale you may have no idea who's making your props for you. (Jim, 1993, p. 10)

The previous section established that decisions about recruitment are not centralised in units. Although contracts are issued by the production office, which is the administrative hub of the unit, hiring and contracting authority is devolved in particular ways:

Laboratories [are regular suppliers]. We look every so often at doing overall deals with camera hire companies, or caterers or transport companies but I find that we can pull far better value and loyalty to the project by allowing the production manager to pull in their people.... As long as I'm happy with who the production manager is, then they are taking the loyalty of the drivers to them....

I'm supposed to have lists of approved vendors, but I don't want to force people to use people that they're not happy with, because they're the people who have to make the show run, not me. (Kay, 1996, p. 9)

Production co-ordinator Sue explained that she hammers out the mechanics of deals after people have been recruited by others within the unit: "You're probably given a list of names for an area that somebody wants, so often times when you're interviewing them, it's really giving them the parameters of the deal and [determining] whether they'll go for it." (1996, p. 12).

Location manager Don talked about the parking and security team which he takes with him from film to film, and the implications of his hiring decisions:

It's taken [me] fourteen years. It's a group of individuals now who are cool. If they can't do it, they still come up with something for me. Got a great idea or way of doing things, and will work from four o'clock in the morning until midnight quite happily. They'll earn a good few quid out of it, but never a moan, never a groan.... Because they love, although they're only contracted in for that brief period, they enjoy it from start to finish. Never catch them snoozing around the corner or not helping out or not getting on with people. That's the main thing....

You have to be so careful.... I employed a security guy.... [He] put in a number of replacements, [one of them] was in charge of...a series of offices...and proceeded to pull a knife on the producer and the controller of [television department]. Nice move, man! Phone call from the producer saying, 'Your security guard's got a knife...' I arrived. Well, it's not actually *my* guy. You learn. You learn in a major way. It's a great bunch of guys with varying skills. It's mistakes made along the way to actually have found them now. (1996, pp. 20 - 21)

In addition to hiring individuals, firms providing goods and services are contracted, and certain qualities are considered core for sub-contractors and suppliers:

Their background knowledge of the film industry; their speed; price - all important - what they can supply for the price; deals they can do. There's the enthusiasm to do it. Be there, sharp, when you ring a company and ask for quotes, for them to come right back to you.... Prompt action. (Pam, 1996, p. 14)

On the sort of films I've been doing, the best deal. And honesty. And a commitment to the film industry. (Tim, 1996, p. 8)

People often carry suppliers with them as they move from unit to unit, creating a kind of continuity of experience. Pam explained why this is important to her:

Things like your Polaroid stock; your stationary; your photocopying machines; depending on the cameraperson, your labs; insurance companies.... You'll probably have shipping companies, travel agents.... catering too.... because you get used to dealing with the companies. They understand your needs. They're quick. There's no wasting time, because with the film industry, everything is immediate. We need it now, yesterday, the day before! So these companies are conditioned to work [with us].... I tell them what my requirements are. For instance, if we were shooting a film in Indonesia or Malaysia, I would ring up [freight company], I'd say, 'We're going to have five tons of camera equipment or three tons or

whatever. What's the best way of shipping that out?'.... It's geared to the industry.
(Pam, 1996, pp. 11 - 12)

Bob (1993, p. 7 - 9) and Ed (1997, p. 11) made similar points.

Jim too carries suppliers from production to production, but he has reservations, believing that although it may be easier for him, it may not always be best for the unit. Tim felt similarly (1996, p. 7). When asked if he developed his suppliers, Jim's dry response was, "No, but I think they do try their best to develop you" (1993, p. 24), explaining:

The minute you ring up to get a price from [firm x] or [firm y], they say, 'Well, let's go out to lunch and talk about it,' and you know it's just a bribe.... I went out for lunch with the freight company from [film] and it just ties you into them if you know them a bit more personally. They're trying to tie you into them. (1993, p. 24)

A negative spin-off of the temporary nature of units is that there is very little interest in developing suppliers. When I asked Tim if he ever developed his suppliers, his blunt response was, "No. I phone someone else. I don't think there's time." (1996, p. 7). Jim feels exactly the same way (1993, p. 25).

5.3.4 TEAMWORK

The weirdest thing is when you get a crisis where everybody pulls in, or you get something that makes everybody laugh and you suddenly have a very large group all responding the same way, and you can immediately feel the ching-ching-ching bonding. It's moving.... It's also rather strange, and people love it. You can see them glowing because there's been some sort of joint rapport. 'Cause it's unusual to have that amongst so many people and it makes everyone feel singular... everybody says they find it very difficult to go outside the group socially during that particular time. They just want to talk about it solidly, because it's absorbing so much of their [energy] and then when they've finished, they also want to talk

about it solidly until something else comes in. So there's this terribly boring thing, where you hear a lot about someone else's production, really boring anecdotes that make all the people who were involved in it fall about and laugh, and everybody else die of boredom.... It's very closed to other people, very clique-y. (Ann, 1993, pp. 53 - 54.)

A number of participants mentioned that for every job vacancy, there were likely to be many applicants who were very well qualified and experienced for the position.

Prospective employers tend to be as interested or more interested in applicants' abilities to work well with others and to *gel* with the group. Only exceptionally talented individuals would be considered for inclusion within a unit without excellent interpersonal skills, and perhaps not even then. Bob (1993, pp. 11 - 12), Jim (1993, p. 26), Ed (1997, p. 14), Tim (1996, p. 8) and Kay (1996, p. 11) agreed with Ann, who emphasised the need for individuals to fit into the group when she talked about recruiting:

It's the skill and the personality interlinked. If you don't know them, you would go on the skills basis, but certainly if I was hiring people I would never hire without meeting them. If I felt that they wouldn't fit into the group I would not take them on unless their skills were so necessary that we could somehow get around the fact that they might not fit in, but that would be very rare...because the group is quite delicate and if there is a disruptive element, it can wreck it. And make it unpleasant. (1993, p. 27)

5.3.5 COMPETENCE

You're only as good as your last film. You cannot afford to have 'off days'. Or 'off weeks' or 'off films'. Because people remember it.... It can be very tough. (Sue, 1996, p. 14)

One must perform brilliantly on one's current unit in order to secure future work. Tim put it like this, "It's freelance. Everybody knows that if they're going to carry on and get

another job, they've got to behave, they don't want to make any enemies." (1996, p. 10). Production manager Jim summed up the sense of fear and insecurity which permeates the sector, "Nobody's got a guarantee they're ever going to work again" (1993, p. 37). Don told about being hired partly because of his specialist knowledge, but mainly because he always delivers:

When everybody else was saying, 'No!' to London, I'd say, 'Yes!' to it. I saw that if you could get in there so you were a regular face running in and running out all the time, but living up to what you said you'd do. And I've still got some great contacts.... They've been let down by others, which is great, because I never let them down. (1996, pp. 21 - 22)

Any serious failure of performance is liable to lead to immediate dismissal. Jim described sacking someone:

As you get nearer the camera [incompetence] probably is more heightened because if you have a direct result on fucking a day's work, then that work can never be repeated. You film it once. You've got to go back and film it, you probably won't get the same thing. So around the camera, if the loader loads the mag wrong or puts the film in.... That's happened. We sacked the loader on [film] because the dickhead opened the mag with a full.... But he didn't do it just once. I would have sacked him if I'd known he did it once, but I found that he'd done it twice, so I sacked him twice as vehemently. That's the sharp end....

If somebody hasn't ordered a cab and picked something up it's hardly as dramatic as somebody opening a mag of film...because the cost implications are different and the artistic implications are different.... One's harder to prove than the other. And one's easier to cover up than the other...and it doesn't have such dramatic consequences. Anybody around the camera or in any technical role, I've been on things where the sound man's been running at 25 frames per second and the camera's been running at 24 frames per second. That's when the sound of vomiting on set.... You can't imagine what it's like on the set when something like that happens. The fucking fear. (1993, pp. 12 - 13)

Pam, speaking of someone who had been sacked for incompetence, said,

What do you do? You train somebody, somebody is working there under the camera department, they've had years of that, and because they haven't done their job properly, they've screwed up [a day's work]. (1996, p. 21)

Ed was bitter about having been blamed for someone else's mistake:

I once nearly got sacked for losing a continuity prop: it was an ice cream tub.... Filming stopped, and I couldn't find it. There was a huge bloody row about this and I was pilloried for it, and there were various people...who didn't employ me for years afterwards because of the reputation I got for it, coming from that one mistake. A chippie building my kitchen, a film chippie...he said, 'Do you remember that ice cream tub?... Did you ever find out what happened to it?' 'No,' I said, 'do you know?' He said, 'Of course I know. I knew all along.' The designer had mixed paints in it and thrown it in the waste paper bin in the street. But she threatened to sack me for losing it because she couldn't own up. (1997, p. 32)

Ed's experience on that occasion was the opposite of teamwork.

5.3.6 ADVANCEMENT

It is possible [to advance within a unit], and I've benefited. Somebody gets into trouble and has to go, and then as you regroup, people who show they're handling the situation, 'Look, how you fancy doing that for us?'.... But it is rare. You employ the number of arms and legs you need to get the thing made, so where are you going to promote anybody to? (Ed, 1997, pp. 15 - 16)

Something like the kind of advancement described above by Ed took place during the production of *Loaded* (1996). My field notes record that M. was promoted from second assistant director to first assistant director when W.R. suddenly emigrated to the USA. Chapter four records how an American director of photography on *The Crying Game* was

replaced by Huw after the first week of principal photography, because his work was unsatisfactory.

Generally, though, people advance their careers when they move from one unit to the next. Bob explains how a runner might get made up to a third assistant director:

You've got a runner who's worked with you on three or four films and you think, 'Well, they're ready, they've done all their time, and they can be a third assistant,' you'd push, you'd hope to say to the next film you're on, if the first assistant doesn't [already] have a third assistant, that you would put him or her forward.... Generally it's [advancement on] the next film or you suggest to other production managers, 'Look, I've got this great chap or woman here, they're ready to be whatever.' That's how.... They'll also ring you up and see what's happening and will you give a reference? (1993, p. 13)

Tim (1996, p. 9) and Ed (1997, p. 16) used almost identical examples.

Pam thought that her own prospects for advancement might develop along similar lines:

If I work with a production manager for many, many years, and he or she thought that I was ready to be upgraded to production manager because they'd been offered a job as production supervisor or line producer, then they might say to you, 'I think you can do this. I'll be there to guide you.' That way. (1996, p. 15)

Chapter two referred to Bob Garratt's (1987) idea that company directors who do not feel competent as leaders continue to be over-involved in the hands-on running of the organization and are particularly liable to interfere in areas of their own technical competence. During a day of observation during the pre-production of the UK/New Zealand feature *Loaded* (1996) Ann spoke about her intention of moving away from areas she was comfortable with in order to become an effective producer. This film marked her first credit as a producer and she was conscious of the changes which her new role required:

To see whether I can deal with the other level of producing which I haven't had to deal with, i.e. a much closer, proper relationship with the director, with the cast. The more creative end of it, the script. And not worry so much about...the transport and budgets.... It's actually proving quite difficult...it's very easy for me to go back and put my nose into the budget and think, 'I'm really working very hard,' and I'm doing this which I don't need to do rather than confront the areas which are more nebulous, they're not things you can list and say, 'I've done that and that and that.' They're ongoing, relationships and things that are negotiated over and over again.... So there's no great sanctuary in it.... It's not what one's used to.... I'm forcing myself to stake that claim and risk it. (1993, pp. 55 - 56)

She was unequivocally attempting to move away from her previous areas of technical competence into a senior management role, and expressing her discomfort at the process, as Garratt described.

Don pondered long and hard about whether or not it would be useful for him to develop his key outdoor worker by promoting him to a desk job. The choice was Don's, and he knew that the consequences would be too:

I used to have a regular assistant. Funnily enough, I've got CVs on my desk now, looking for a new one. We are a team. I get employed; he or she comes with me. That's part of the package. I have a security team, a regular security team that I use all the time, combined security and parking team....

For the last four, five years the guy who runs my parking and security team, he's the lead individual.... There's a thought: should he be my assistant? I [trust him] so much from that side of things and he knows the film industry and the TV industry so well. Perhaps he should be sitting there, at that desk. He possesses the skills to a point....

He did ask me once or twice, the possibilities.... It takes a certain type of person to be able to balance between the knowledge of *on location* to *back in the office*. For the on location side of things he's absolutely brilliant, he's mustard! I just know that he wouldn't gel in this office environment, so there's a hesitation.

Plus the fact that he never stops working as he is, he's so good in his field; he works for several location managers. We fight tooth and nail to keep him. From his own personal point of view, he wants to climb that ladder a bit more, and whether somebody else.... Whether it's just me that's saying, 'D., mate, fine as you are, mate. You probably don't want to get in here.'.... If he's in here doing well as an assistant location manager/location manager, I've lost the best security and street man I've ever had. Got to find another one. Don't know if that's selfish or not. It's hard....

There's people I'm ringing now...chat to them on the phone. I had a young guy in the other day.... I could see it would work well. I've got CVs there.... They've got degrees, they've got this, they've got that, they've got sixty words per minute. I don't even type. They've got everything, it seems, within their CVs, all their achievements. But have they got that drive, that interest and that common sense and [the ability to conduct a] dialogue out there, to balance between in here and out there? It's a fine line. I don't carry any qualifications whatsoever. My way of doing things is conversation, personality, a lot of common sense and just a general love of what I do....

There are so many people out there who think they can become a location manager.... And there's one or two that come and try and get the shock of their lives! But D., he just doesn't stop working...it's 365 days a year, 24 hours a day if he wants to.... If he asks me, then I would say, 'No, I'm sorry, I don't think it's quite there.' It's double edged, when there's a good man there...then you're under double pressure in the office here if he's not coming up to scratch and the guy out there isn't. (1996, pp. 16 - 19)

In film units, notions of key skills and core learning are linked to teamwork skills and experiential skills gained working in previous temporary organizations.

For freelances, advancement can be unpredictable. Merit is very important, but other factors come into play too, and these are based on networking skills (or the lack of them)

and word of mouth. A couple of participants mentioned the anomalies that talent-spotting and mentoring practices create in the film production sector. Don talked about overnight success: "I could be working with a runner who makes my tea and does the photocopying one year, and she'll be employing me the next. That's their choice, that's their way of networking, that's their rise. (1997, p. 22).

Sue was aware of the need to get on with people in such a small and volatile industry for similar reasons:

People can advance very quickly and they can also fall very quickly. So it's a good policy to treat everyone very well. Even when they really piss you off.... There's a runner I had who came out of Working Title in 1987 who is now a producer and doing very well. So I employed him in 1987, he would now be in a position to employ me. (1996, pp. 31 - 32)

5.3.7 EMPLOYMENT AS A REWARD

How you perform in this job obviously effects how you get on in your next one.
(Jim, 1993, p. 56)

When asked if job performance on units was ever rewarded in special ways, Jim (1993, pp. 28 - 29) mentioned bonuses, and then said, "And you also get employed again, hopefully. If it's gone well, quite often you're offered the next thing, so that's very nice." Like Jim, Sue thought of future employment as a reward for current job performance. She first mentioned profit points in exchange for deferring salary, and then emphasised, "You just hope that your performance was adequate to make sure you get the next one [job]" (1996, p. 16). Bob said, "If you feel somebody's done a very good job, [if] the producer does, he'll say, 'If we can make it work, we'll definitely have you on the next film.'.... But you can't promise that, of course. You don't know when you're going to work next and you don't know if the production's right for that person. Or they might be [working] on

something else.” (Bob, 1993, p. 16). Pam thought the offer of future employment was a great way to be thanked for her hard work:

The producer said he would pass my name forward to other people, and likewise the production manager, who congratulated me, and kept saying, ‘I’d like to work with you again!’ (1996, p. 32).

5.3.8 WORD OF MOUTH

It works in both ways, because if you’ve got a good buzz about you it works positively. If you’ve pissed somebody off, then it goes around exactly the opposite way. (Jim, 1993, p. 22)

A theme running through stories of hiring is the tremendous importance of word of mouth. Everyone is aware of the power of a casual comment, whether it is true or not. Don (1996, pp. 24 - 25) and Kay (1996, p. 7) said much the same as Sue in this excerpt:

You’re talking about someone’s livelihood. And the future. It can be very vicious.... If someone says to me, ‘Sue, what do you think of so-and-so?’ If someone values my opinion and I don’t like that person, I could say, ‘Well, they were hell to work with,’ or ‘They’re crap.’ They may not get a job because of my opinion. That side of the film business is really hairy. I am very careful, if I’m slagging someone off, I bear in mind that they might not get a job because of something I didn’t like about them so I try and say, ‘I didn’t get on with them but I think the quality of their work was such and such.’... You have to remember that people are saying that about you, too. (1996, p. 33)

Kay made a slightly different point, when she explained how she checks up on the technical expertise of people she is thinking of contracting:

If I’m hiring a UK cameraman, there are various camera hire companies that I’ll ring.... It’s the use of other experts, people who know what they’re talking about, and they can say, ‘God, he’s just fabulous on a T2 at stop x, y and z’.... We were

looking for a visual effects supervisor on a big special effects picture that we're doing at the moment...and I don't have any experience of it, so I rang every visual effects house in England and said, 'Who do you reckon is the best at their job in the UK?' And also peers, peers of the cameraman, rather than my peers. (1996, p. 8)

Kay networks to locate technical experts she can use as advisors.

5.3.9 SUMMARY: EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Recruitment is a key process for film units. Hiring, contracting and sub-contracting decisions are ways of ensuring continuity, psychological comfort (by selecting known and trusted colleagues to work with) and competence. Although the producer and director set the tone within a unit in terms of organizational values, personnel decisions tend to be devolved to heads of department, who recruit their own staff or bring their own pre-existing SPWG as part of a package deal. Hiring decisions are made on the reputational assets of individuals and firms, based on direct experience, word of mouth, or the opinions of other experts in the sector. Competence and word of mouth are highly valued, to the extent that, as with Ed's anecdote above, individuals will sacrifice other team members to protect their own reputations. People on units work together and learn together.

Teamwork is an essential requirement of working in temporary organizations such as film units. It is not only necessary – it is seductive and bonding. In terms of teamwork, there are not necessarily clear-cut distinctions between freelances contracted to a unit and suppliers.

Advancement in film production tends to take place from one job to the next, with promotion considered a post hoc reward for a job well done. However, advancement can be unpredictable. Competence is very important, but other factors come into play, and these are based on networking skills and word of mouth.

In film units, notions of key skills and core learning are linked to teamwork skills and experiential skills gained working in previous temporary organizations.

5.4 NETWORKING

Networking in film units is a key way that individuals develop the social dimension of work relationships in order to make negotiating more effective and efficient:

These features of real-world transactions [bounded rationality and opportunism] give rise to costs - what Ouchi (1980) and others, call 'transactions costs', i.e. the costs entailed in searching out information, of negotiating and securing contracts and then of monitoring compliance with them. But in the real world - as opposed to the ideal world of perfect competition - economic transactions generally involve wider social relationships; they don't just involve momentary contacts between completely anonymous people or agents...if these social relationships generate some degree of trust, then transactions costs can be lowered, so making for greater efficiency in the use of resources. (Harriss, 2000, p. 235)

In "A Hybrid or a Third Way" Hewitt (1999) quotes Hakansson and Snehota's explanation of how managing relationships enables all parties to maximise the benefits of working together:

'Value for others is not produced simply by economizing and saving on the costs of relationships, rather, it is achieved mainly by improving the pay-offs from relationship investment. It is achieved by managing the relationships' benefits, by developing and exploiting the activity links, resources, ties and actor bonds in business relationships, which in turn is improving the economic efficiency of the overall network structure.' (p. 62)

Individuals in film units learn through a variety of networks which include colleagues, rivals and suppliers. Technical information is readily shared. This professional etiquette is highly practical in the sense that one expects both to contribute knowledge to others and to receive it from them. Burubles and Bruce say, "Learning aims are seen in terms of

group dynamics and meaning-making, and not only as individual achievements among participants...dialogue plays a central role because it is a medium through which participants are able to share their conceptions, verify or test their understandings, and identify areas of common knowledge or difference.” (Daskalaki & Blair, 2002, p. 2). Frederiksen, Jensen and Dawids (2002) have suggested that “reputation and *know who*...gains increasing importance” (p. 21) in the context of project-based work, and that being able to “interpret metaphors used and stories told between the different project players” (p. 21) is a key skill, and this is also true in temporary organizations such as film units.

5.4.1 NETWORKING IN

UK film units operate a variety of standard procedures. These were discussed in chapter three. Freelances are expected to understand their own responsibilities as well as the contributions that others make. Set routines and expectations are helpful in bonding freelance workers together in familiar patterns of work, and these routines and expectations facilitate networking:

You book sixty individuals [as unit crew] and you...give them a schedule. They all turn up, they get out of the car and they have breakfast and the first assistant says, ‘Right, we’ve got to have a track from here to here.’ And the grip turns up with the track, dolly comes out, the camera arrives, and, ‘Hi, I’m the driver.’ ‘I’m the grip.’ ‘I’m the chippie, I’ll level that for you,’ and it just happens. It’s extraordinary. (Ed, 1997, pp. 32 - 33)

It’s just amazing, got each other in for a day, and they’re gelling with each other.... They meet at eight o’clock and at ten past eight they’re working on ideas together.... Very good team work skills from start to finish. As I said before, they’ll see more of each other than they will of their families [during production] and it does get a bit worn and a bit tested at the end.... If there’s a common cause,

it's to achieve that schedule, let's film the sequence [today]. (Don, 1996, pp. 43 - 44)

Informal networking can supplement more formal mechanisms: "[LL: What other ways does knowledge and information circulate around the unit?] Gossip.... It's a small band of people, it's gossip and the call sheet." (Huw, 1996, p. 14).

When I asked Jim how communications are structured in film units, he told me about the first assistant director running the floor, about call sheets, about the schedule and about informal networking: "There's lots and lots of informal chats. Everybody's in one building and everybody chats to one another all the time about what they think is going on with the scene, and how they're going to shoot it." (1993, p. 42).

Location work promotes personal relationships within units, with richer opportunities for networking and gossip:

People get a lot closer if they're away on location and they're playing together every night, which actually makes for a much better unit. You get a more cohesive unit when you're away on location...than you do on a London-based film. (Sue, 1996, p. 5)

Other than the core documentation already mentioned in chapter three (the script, the schedule, daily call sheets, and reports), there is an expectation that knowledge and information will *not* be pooled within units. There is a minimal sharing of knowledge, a negligible communal knowledge base, and this is quite contrary to learning organization theory. Ed explained how he relies on other departments for specialist guidance, because he does not have enough technical knowledge to make certain decisions:

Many of the [departments] like camera, sound, lighting, costume design are so specialised.... They know more than we [in the production office] do.... I mean, the phone goes, the camera trainee is on the phone saying, 'We've got to have a

matte black alloy three quarter inch three spin focus lever.' Now, that might be for sports car of the week. Don't mind me, I don't know! (1997, p. 12)

It is generally acknowledged that each department, and every individual within it, has specialist networks and knowledge: "Each department has [its] own networks" (Sue, 1996, p. 7), which are made available only as and when required. Knowledge seems to be available on a need-to-know basis. Expertness is vital, but there is no interest in centralising expertise. When I asked Jim (1993, p. 42) how individuals contribute to the knowledge base of the unit he said, "Everybody brings their own specialist skill...and everybody brings their own experience, in that sense they contribute, but normally they're hired for their contribution." To the question "Is knowledge ever centralised or pooled so that other people in the organization have access to it in some kind of formal way?" he replied, "No. It's all informal. If somebody's done something before, you go and talk to them about it.... Everybody brings specialist skills. You hire them because of their specialist skill. We don't all pitch into a central information source."

Kay reinforced the primacy of specialisation within her mini-major, simultaneously mentioning information flows around the business: "Everyone overlaps and everyone uses other departments to fill in the gaps in their knowledge, but I'd no more imagine I could do [another department's] job than fly to the moon.... And they'd go white if I asked them to read a [film unit document]." (1996, p. 17).

Participating in the work of unit departments other than one's own (except for production office staff, who are understood to have a particular need to know across the organization) is seen as contaminating of one's professionalism and taboo: "[Cross functional roles are] not usual because people want to be known as doing something [specific].... Whereas if they seem sort of messing [about], people don't use them, because they want a specialist." (Ed, 1997, p. 24).

Expertness is important in other professions too, and chapter six considers notions of novice-to-expert development in film units and in a contrasting occupation, nursing, as

explored by Benner (1984) in her ground-breaking study *From Novice to Expert: Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice*.

Networking In: The Script

Almost all UK feature film production units centre their operations on types of printed material: the script; the schedule; the daily call sheet; and various reports which enable, and sometimes require, individuals to co-ordinate with others inside (and outside) the unit. The script, the schedule and the call sheet are discussed in chapter three.

The principal networking mechanism is the script, from which all unit activities and systems spring. The role of the script is also considered in chapter six. Jim explains how the director works with departments to determine how the script will be broken down, and specific responsibilities identified and allocated within the unit:

[During pre-production] the director will spend a bit of time...with each head of department so they can break down the script, go through the script, and collate all the information about what the director wants from that scene...you might spend an afternoon with a costume designer, going through costume designs; then a morning with the location manager, looking at locations; then an afternoon with an artistic designer going through the various looks of the set; and that's how the days are spent; looking at the cast, that sort of thing. (1993, p. 40)

Ann (1993, p. 12), Tim (1996, pp. 23 - 24), Pam (1996, p. 30), and Sue (1996, p. 25) all stressed the primacy of the script as a unit networking device.

Networking In: The Production Office

We [the production office] are the spider at the centre of the web, it's receiving information, assessing who it needs to go to, and making sure it goes to them. (Ed, 1997, p. 29)

Individuals working in the production office, especially the producer, (line producer, if there is one), production manager, production-co-ordinator and production secretary, are units' specialist communicators and networkers. They collectively ensure that internal and external communications systems are appropriate, operational and effective, and they know exactly what is going on with every department and every individual at all times. They also conduct research for their own areas of work and for most departments in the unit. The director and his or her assistants too have formal roles to play in unit communications, but the hub of communications activity is the production office. Referring to the production office, Ann said, "That's where the knowledge resides and that's where everything has to go into to get back out again." (1993, p. 47). Don explained its importance:

The production office is a main base. Central core.... Everything that I co-ordinate or put together is done by that office. And then the whole [unit] is aware what I'm up to via that office. She knows where I am, twenty-four hours a day. And what I'm up to. Yeah, it's the main point. Even when the office shuts, we know that the co-ordinator will know.... Central control, it's where all the information goes to, from. Where I put it into and where I receive it from as well. (1996, p. 38)

Tim gave examples of how unit members relate to the production office:

There's the floor, which is run by the assistant director, and there's the production office which supervises what's going on in the art department and other departments.... How communication works? God! Generally the system works well. It's a very international thing; the whole arrangement is very similar everywhere.... Most people doing most jobs could work on a film unit in other countries without being too surprised....

The production office is the hub. For instance, all transportation should be run through the production office, the co-ordinator runs it. Or the transport manager, if there is one. So a prop man shouldn't book a truck. He will come and do it through.... And anything that involves monies should have an order. Even though that order may not come from the production office, the copy will go to the

production office and to the accountant. That's a major means of communication.
(1996, pp. 17 - 19)

Sometimes other departments expect the production office to network solutions to their problems: "They either come into the production office...and get you to find out for them, or they do their own homework but I don't know what sources they have" (Pam, 1996, pp. 10 - 11).

Sue explained how she co-ordinates information, and why it is important that production office staff understand, in detail, various unit arrangements. In this extract, she refers to knowledge management within the unit and to unit hierarchy:

I make charts for everything. I like everything to be visual, because at any given point I need to know precisely the latest information. The information is changing hourly and has to be re-issued and everyone has to have the most up-to-date information all the time. You're dealing with between sixty to one hundred and fifty people who need this information. I have everything charted and I have a *school register* so that everybody - the most important people are at the top - everybody that needs the information, and what the information is going crosswise. I tick it off when they've had it....

You get it down to a fine art, you become good at accumulating information and getting it out quickly. That is the part of film I find very boring. A secretary could do that. That is not demanding.... What I find interesting is the other side of information....

You have your schedule [for a particular scene]...they will need ten extra portable make-up mirrors. If there's a crane on that day, I'll need an extra grip who needs to travel, have accommodation, needs information.... Now there's a schedule change, and this scene moves to a different spot. Well, I need to be able to know that the scene has all those different elements which are in addition to what is already going on, that all of those people know it has changed, that I know when I need to bring them down, that they have the information they need and that

they have the accommodation.... Juggling all of that kind of stuff, it's juggling with a huge amount of balls, and it's quite exciting. And that's where my charts and graphs come in, so I can see on any given day what's needed, who's needed.
(1996, pp. 26 - 27)

In addition to circulating technical and timetabling information, the production office is responsible for the brokering of management problems within the unit:

[Some problems] can be solved [by] giving them [unit members] the time of day.... By explaining the situation to them, they feel they are part of it, rather than kept in the dark. It's important to let your crew members know what's going on. They don't have to know the nitty-gritty...what the financial situation is, or what the budget is, or anything like that, but it's certainly useful for them to know if there are problems. Treating people as adults and human beings is vital management. We tend to undermine people and assume that they will not understand. (Pam, 1996, pp. 3 - 4)

Synopsis: Networking In

Organizational routines have been criticised by David Garvin:

Unfortunately, most organizations have been designed with the status quo firmly in mind. They accomplish their work through what scholars call 'routines,' commonly accepted practices and procedures that are uniform, unvarying, and performed without thinking.¹ Repetition and consistency, rather than new insights, are the primary goals. (2000, p. 19)

However, this study indicates that film units are different. They use routines in specific ways: as this chapter and chapters three and four have indicated, it is through routines and practices which are industry-standard that units come together and function well so immediately.

With the advent of new technology, the paperless office and increasing computing skills, self-servicing unit managers can inadvertently block the flow of information around the unit:

When letters were written long form and they were being typed and everything had to pass through a secretary to get into a publishable form...they [production secretaries] were absolute powerhouses, that's how I've learned, because when I was a [production] secretary I saw everything, confidential material, non-confidential, budgets, phones, everything had to pass through one person, even though you weren't actually dealing with it, you were witness to it and people forget that you.... I notice that even now with us, because I do all my own paperwork and don't pass it through the co-ordinator, so I sometimes don't bother to copy, and you can actually get quite a breakdown of communication...because they're simply not party to it.... There's no centralised filing. (Ann, 1993, pp. 46 - 47)

ICT can block information instead of facilitating its flow.

People who work in units focus on their own department, and don't necessarily understand how the unit as a whole functions:

If more production people understood why the first assistant needs more runners on that day, and so on, and if people on the floor understood what it was the production office are trying to achieve, you wouldn't have this terrible us and them attitude which the industry is riddled with. Production co-ordinators work exceptionally hard and good ones are very skilled. They get all this aggravation from people who don't understand what [production office people] are doing.... Whatever I know about the floor, I know more about the floor than any of them know about the production office. [Ed, 1997, pp. 25 - 26]

The production office plays a vital knowledge management role for the unit, as the hub of a wide variety of networks and information inputs. The script provides unifying focus for the organization.

5.4.2 NETWORKING OUT

There are a variety of formal mechanisms for networking outside the unit and for collecting information, including: professional organizations; statutory organizations; unions; courses; seminars; publications and journals. These are more or less highly regarded, depending on the individual and the circumstances.

Networking Out: Formal Mechanisms

Ann told me about her networks:

There's *Women in Film*. There's *PACT*. I very rarely use *Women in Film* because that's never worked properly. There's the media, Euro-lot, they all have their own flavour. There's something called the *Media Exchange* who are very interested in cultural cross-overs, taking people into the States, bringing them here, taking people into Europe and bringing them back, exchange visits, I suppose. Those would be the main ones. (1993, p. 22)

Jim cynically described a relatively new (at the time of his interview) networking organization for aspiring producers - *New Producers' Alliance*:

It's just fascinating, because you're sitting there and...everybody comes to share the information, but no bastard's giving it out. When I went there last time, there was this bloke who did a ten minute short saying that he knew nothing about how to market it and could anybody advise him? Everybody sniggered and didn't say anything. A certain amount of people over there, they think they're very hot shot; nobody wants to admit that they probably don't know a flying fuck about what they're doing. (1993, p. 5)

Ann was not impressed by *New Producers' Alliance* either, preferring an established peer network of her own (one that Jim cannot access):

New Producers' Alliance...are just starting up. The general idea was that we could network and share information on an open level. It's very rare, it's very difficult.

We always used to joke about it because at one stage there were five of us all working in the same capacity when we were line producers, five women, and we would very openly share, although there was always one person who didn't.... And you need to know when you ring about, 'What did you think of so and so?' they will actually not just say, 'Oh, I think they're great!' They will actually say, 'Well, there's this, and there's this.'...

That producer network [from] then now sort of exists within a different group, but it's a more selfishly guarded thing because as a producer you're looking for financial sources and there is still an overriding feeling, which people can't get rid of, that if somebody else takes up a bit of grant or subsidy, that means they won't get it. So there's a huge fear... (1993, p. 20)

Don finds film commissions useful, but also feels threatened by the ease of access which they have made possible:

You've got the *London Film Commission*, which is really becoming established. I was operating in London a long time before the film commission and I used to have lots of problems.... It's just improved it immensely. I'm now meeting with film liaison officers or police officers responsible for parking and filming in certain areas.... But I was asked to do these jobs because it was hard: 'Don, you know your way around.' Of course I know my way around; that's what you employ me for. Now it seems...there's a system there, it all gets dealt with. It seems a lot easier.... And before me, the legendary great old location managers. My God, great old guys, how the hell did they ever set these things up? Filming used to be a very rare event, not so much now. You just have to go with the flow.... To go in there and find you're welcomed and there's a system. It's all financial. The companies [units] don't like it, but the local authorities are prepared to help for a price. Whereas there used to be trouble tracking down the individual who could get you that permission, and he would do it for the love of it.... But now, of course, local authority, 'Yeah, fine, we'll help you. There's the charge.' (1996, pp. 15 - 16)

Participants mentioned various other information gathering mechanisms:

If you're looking for specific areas, like you're looking for somebody who can use a helicopter, the place I would always go is *The Knowledge* to see who's there. (Jim, 1993, p. 21)

Basically, using books. *The Knowledge*. *Film Bang* [the Scottish trade directory].... You would approach but treat with suspicion information that comes from Film Commissions ...London, Midlands, Scottish, Newcastle.... I use *PACT* broadly for legal advice, copies of agreements, contracts, advice on how to implement agreements, and *BECTU* I use when I want to phone somebody up [and] show that I can have an argument over the phone. They're obstructive and unhelpful. Location managers will lean more heavily on Film Commissions for location access, people on the floor will use the union for advice on whether or not the agreement is being observed, or what they can and can't get. (Ed, 1997, pp. 10 - 11)

I'm only a member of *PACT* whilst a film is being made. Although I've got my own company, I don't have a *PACT* membership. A member of *BAFTA*, but I wouldn't say that was a formal arrangement.... It's very much dealing with personalities.... Personal contacts. Because it is a small industry. It's tiny. (Tim, 1996, p. 6)

There's the odd seminar on something [technical]. Somebody might bring out a new light and you go along and have a lecture about it. (Huw, 1996, p. 13)

[LL: What are your fact finding mechanisms?] Hearsay. I get sent information. If people have a new product, they send me, as a cameraman, things. Also, when I do commercials, I get to use equipment that is quite exotic. [LL: Any other ways?] Talking to friends.... There's the odd magazine. (Huw, 1996, pp. 4 - 5)

In the past they might have used unions as networking, which I don't think really exists anymore.... And they have different guilds now too.... Designers' guild, directors' guild and writers' guild and crafts guilds...and often the information shared is technically applicable only to them. (Ann, 1993, pp. 22 - 23)

[When asked about improving his performance and increasing his knowledge]
Maintain lots of different standards in lots of different area, with the police and local authority contacts, because when you start to let down so many areas you do affect all your colleagues and anyone else going into that area. (Don, 1995, p. 31)

Many formal networking mechanisms are specialist. For instance, when asked about his formal networks, Don mentioned location companies:

Some are very good.... I use them as and when I can, as and when I'm allowed to, because they charge.... Sitting here [in his office], go down to a location library and sit there all morning picking out locations, that's not quite the job.

But...you've got a problem, you're trying to find this location, it's very specific. The window size. The shape. The hallway. The logistics. The stairway. Whatever, the grounds, the view beyond. They don't mind you going in there, you might as well get in there and make sure you're not wasting your time, see if it does exist in that sort of form, is that available? Sometimes you'll find that [a location's owner has] signed the rights away to this location library management company, that you must go through them. They're looking after the contract side of things. Good luck to them; they've assured their client minimum £1,500 a day. (1996, pp. 14 - 15)

Networking Out: Informal Networks

You think of all the films that have had that [special] effect, and then you find out who the production manager was, and you ring them up and find out what a fucking awful time he had doing it. (Jim, 1993, p. 21)

Reliance on peers, whether they are personal acquaintances or not, is vital at every level in feature film production. Because of tight time scales, it is important to be able to tap expertise immediately. There is a willingness to share information today on the basis that you may be requesting assistance from others tomorrow. This can extend to the borrowing of expensive equipment: "I'm out of the studio and I need to borrow a lens, I could go to another unit and say, 'Can I borrow your whatever?' And they'd lend it to me." (Huw, 1996, p. 17).

Information is provided and received on a personal basis. It is nothing to do with units or production companies, and Tim makes this clear: "I wouldn't ring up Working Title. I would ring up somebody I know at Working Title. It's the personalities that are involved with these companies...which are not necessarily company networks." (1996, p. 5).

For Jim, the distinction between networking for professional purposes and socialising is blurred:

There's definitely a social side to the industry.... A mixture of socialising and, because you get on a project-by-project basis, your network expands. Every job I've been on, I've met somebody else I've got on well with, who I ring up and talk to. (1993, p. 23)

Jim (1993, p. 19), Sue (1996, p. 7) and Bob (1993, pp. 6 - 8) all mentioned that they regularly share information informally with peers. Bob, for example, checks his deals:

There's a few production managers, associate producers, who are sort of friendly and you try to keep a faith of nations on certain productions that are of a certain [level of finance].... You don't actually phone up and say, 'Well, how much did you get it for?' but you know there's a certain figure that people work for and certain deals you can do. You try and share that information. (1993, p. 6)

For freelances, informal external networks can perform a similar function to professional supervision in social services settings, when individuals are afforded the opportunity to discuss difficult work situations with trusted peers and mentors:

The contact, certainly for me, being isolated and not having a lot of people around me unless I'm in production, I would probably be speaking on the phone to somebody at least once a day who was not necessarily connected into the work I was doing, but just somebody doing something else, so a colleague or friend. (Ann, 1993, pp. 21 - 22)

Friends of mine, who do the same job as me (production manager), who've grown up at the same time with me, we have a debriefing lunch when one of us has finished a show, where you sit down and say, 'God, so and so was a bitch. I can't believe it! That guy was a pig.' And you spew it all out.... You laugh about it. Trusted peers who are professional friends.... You have to have someone there who you can laugh with, because it does get horrible. (Kay, 1996, p. 23)

Both Ann (1993, pp. 2 – 23) and Don mentioned the London practice of *lighthouseing*:

That's networking, or they call it lighthouseing, at Pinewood or Shepperton, you can go lighthouseing on a Friday lunch time, in the bars or in the restaurants, you're in there, you're walking through, and you're beaming out, your beam is hitting one or two targets...just letting people know you're there. (Don, 1996, p. 42)

Sometimes networking provides opportunities for *schadenfreude*:

People take a strange delight when they hear there are problems on another film, particularly if your film is seemingly in good shape. It's not nasty. It's just the way it is. They're not maligning you; they have that attitude which is, 'Oh, goody, I guess we're on a better one now.' It happens to all of us, we always work on a bad movie at some point. (Pam, 1996, p. 9)

Synopsis: Networking Out

Dahl and Pedersen's 2002 Danish Research Unit for Industrial Dynamics (DRUID) working paper, *Knowledge Flows through Informal Contacts in Industrial Clusters: Myth or Realities?* demonstrated that a regional cluster of engineers in Northern Denmark "share[s] even valuable knowledge with informal contacts. This shows that informal contacts are important channels of knowledge diffusion." (p. 1). As with film production, "This channel [informal networking] is also likely to be used as a way to establish the reputation of the individual in the local environment" (p. 20). This Danish research suggests that the type of networking described in this section is not unique to temporary organizations or to film units, although its frequency, extent, duration or significance may be.

Freelances are absolutely dependent on external networks, and individuals develop wide ranges to suit the demands of particular roles in the unit. Networks are uniquely collaged configurations developed throughout a career, although there are also many shared elements, *The Knowledge*, for example. Connections which may initially form within units (networking in) often then become enduring relationships when both parties are working on different units, transferring to the category of external networks.

5.4.6 COLLABORATION AND COMPETITION

There is a sense in the industry that people compete for jobs, but that once an appointment has been made, everyone is willing to co-operate: "It's competitive until you've got the job and then people do collaborate." (Ed, 1997, p. 32). Huw (1996, p. 17) and Bob (1993, p. 24) said much the same. Within units, since people are appointed to specific short-term roles and resources are allocated during pre-pre-production, there is little to compete for during production.

Tim (1996, p. 5) and Kay thought of the sector when they commented on competitiveness:

There are a few films that are about to come out now, British films, that you just hope to Christ are going to be really good, that aren't ours. You want them to be really, really good. If you're running two projects simultaneously, like a little while ago there were two [similar features] that came out at the same time, unfortunately one was ours...then you hope desperately that the other one fails hideously. But generally, there's a very *any success is good for all of us* feeling. Until you get to the Oscars. (Kay, 1996, pp. 6 - 7)

Don didn't comment directly on competitiveness and collaboration, but made a fundamental point about the nature of working relationships in the UK film industry, which are based on estimations of mutual benefit:

There's not many friends in this industry. The hundreds of people you work with... if you did two or three productions a year with two or three hundred [on each one].... I've got real friends, social friends, over that period of time [fourteen years]: four who work in this business....

Like millions of others, I've got hundreds of *friends* within the industry.... We never carry that into social life beyond work. It's all about knowing people and faces. If I walk into Pinewood or Shepperton it's all great mates, because they all like to be great mates with the location manager, because if they're talking to you, you can be a very early source of work. (1996, p. 41)

5.4.7 CASE STUDY: TUNNELS, PHEASANTS AND CRANES

There was a choice of cases for this section. In the case that has not been used, Don (1997) explained a problem he had solved, which involved rolling a tank into a purpose-built river on an army-controlled part of Salisbury plain. He was personally responsible for co-ordinating the army, the MOD's defence land agents, a farmer, special effects men, the art department, the producer, the director, the production manager, and his own crew. This involved sophisticated networking within the unit and outside it. Rich though that example was, the following extract in which Don explains how he sources and uses

information, gives a fuller impression of the sheer variety of networks a single individual can operate in the context of a series of temporary organizations:

[Getting information] is quite bizarre in this job. Someone will throw [a script] down on your desk and it will contain tunnels.... 'Where do you find tunnels, Don?' Bit of experience, good memory.... I base it on individuals. I get to know people as best I can, as quickly as I can, and remember those individuals and try and source what they know in their experience as a water board person: where are the storm drains in West London?.... But the tunnels we will use for this, I know we will, they're brilliant. I remembered chatting to a couple of builders in Clink Street when I was filming [film]. And somewhere in there they were working on these tunnels and I went back and they're still there, a massive great project.... I didn't pay any attention to it at the time and all of a sudden he said, 'Yeah, through those double doors.' And I sourced it back, talking to a guy at British Rail who owned the property.... Got in touch with the guy, and there's two and a half acres of these tunnels underground. They have been used [in previous filming], but not in such a vast way as we want to use them. Quite a scoop, from chatting to a builder. But chatting to a builder, then to source expertise, you suddenly have to become an expert on tunnels on this particular [script].

On an episode of [television series] you have to become an expert in gamekeeping. We had to do a pheasant shoot. And it has to be right. Because you're passing that information on to a director, and he's [asking questions].... Source the expertise. It's just people, and knowing, and being persistent....

In this episode, we need a man to jump off a crane on a building site. Already I know that the health and safety thing is going to be a problem so I start speaking to crane people and making them see that I'm aware of the health and safety thing and gaining a little bit of their expertise back on the health and safety side of a man jumping off. There's no book, *Crane Filming*. It's not in the *Yellow Pages*. It's just sourcing an individual who's prepared to take you on.... Mainly, old contacts introduce you to new contacts.... There are some individuals [who] don't want to know, there's no need to pursue those any more. They're not

interested, you've got to go with this other guy, he's more keen. You've then got to sway the production...a lot of location managers make that mistake. They pursue it with the [uninterested] guy because the director said, 'I've got to have that orange crane.' Why not the yellow one? And so they waste time on this guy with the orange crane, the yellow one's sitting there, it's all ready. It's a little bit of a sway, to push him.... I go with the feel. You just know that this guy is not going to let you down. It's going to work, from a production value [point of view] it's working. The only problem is the colour. So what! Then you've got to sit in meetings and convince people about that. That's part of the control of the job....

You source this expertise up to a certain point. You've got to call it a day somewhere, because you've got to get this tied in because [the scene is being filmed] next Wednesday and you've got sixty-five people running around, the paper work has to be in place, and you've got to be ready. (1996, pp. 12 - 14)

5.4.8 SUMMARY: NETWORKING

To quote Tennyson's *The Brook* (1853): "For men may come and men may go, But I go on for ever." Units arise and disband, but networks endure. They are flexible, of course, ebbing and flowing as circumstances change, underpinning UK films units.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS: HIGH SPEED, HIGH PRESSURE LEARNING IN UK FILM UNITS

Film units are conundrums. The Möbius strip, a one-sided surface formed by joining together two ends of a long rectangular strip, one end having been twisted through 180° before the join is made (Kirkpatrick (Ed.), 1983, p. 809), suggests itself as the metaphor for this chapter. As you trace its surface with a finger tip, the *inside* of the loop becomes the *outside*. So it seems with film units, which are microcosms of paradox, wherein organizational features are simultaneously true and false, present and absent, internal and

external, useful and destructive. This seems especially true of temporariness and learning in units.

On the one hand, units are so unboundaried that they hardly exist. On the other, they are impermeable cliques whose members shun contact with outsiders.

Film units are so temporary that most film people work in more than five per year, yet the relationships in SPWGs and other networks can endure for decades, longer than most jobs in conventional organizations.

Learning is not valued in units, which are all about delivering today, not improving performance for tomorrow. On the other hand, it could be claimed that all working time on a unit is paid learning time. Every job on the unit involves solving a stream of problems. Contract workers may end up doing obscure or bizarre research to fulfil the requirement of whatever film they are working on at the moment. In this chapter, freelance individuals stressed their fascination with the learning dimension of their jobs. Learning is highly valued in units - by contract workers. Operating in a fast paced exciting environment which requires intense and rapid learning to achieve organizational goals motivates contract workers to return again and again to jobs which in other ways are deeply unappealing.

Senge (1990) has implied that the learning in learning organizations is characterised by being positive, responsible and enjoyable. In this chapter, negative dimensions of learning in film units have been demonstrated. For example, units have learned to cut corners on health and safety issues, individuals have learned to overspend and temporary organizations have learned that it is not always necessary to honour contracts.

Daskalaki and Blair (2002) say, "individuals...come together and collectively create new meaning and new routines or negotiate and re-establish old ones" (p. 3). Unit freelances learn about their current unit and how to function within it. They learn about new units

frequently, often five times or more annually. They must be quick to learn all the things they claimed they could do already in order to get their jobs, plus any other skills their new line managers expects them to possess but they have not got. They need to keep an eye on whoever in their current unit is doing the job they want to do next, and make sure to notice and learn everything he or she is doing, offering to help out as much as possible in addition to being brilliant at their own job, so that they can attract excellent word of mouth and break a grade on the move to their next unit. They need to network solutions to current problems and find their next job through networking too.

Daskalaki and Blair (2002) think that film units are activity systems, a theory developed by Engeström in relation to the Finnish health care system. He suggests that activity systems are:

...built based on the relations between agents..., the community of which they are members...and the conception people have about their activities. These relations necessarily also involve the mediated role of technologies or techno-actors or 'actants' (Latour, 1987)...language and...implicit and explicit social rules, systems and division of labour prevalent in their 'communities of practice.' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). (p. 3).

Daskalaki and Blair quote Engström as having devised the term *knotworking* to describe a:

'...rapidly pulsating, distributed and partially improvised orchestration of collaborative performance between otherwise loosely connected actors and activity systems. A movement of tying, untying together seemingly separate threads of activity characterizes knotworking.' (2002, pp. 15)

Exciting though this description is, it does not quite capture the nature of units as temporary organizations. The notion of tying and untying suggests that strands exist before and after the activity. In film units, strands are brought into existence by departments specifically to contribute to a moment in principal photography, and then discarded. The knowledge gained remains within individuals, SPWG and systems, whether administrative or technical (such as a redesigned call sheet or an improved stedicam).

Knowledge is also preserved somewhat as insects in amber are: through being embedded in the artefact - by being recorded on film or video, which functions in this sense as an archival document as well as a feature film. Furthermore, although the strands formed to solve a particular problem may cease to exist when the problem is solved, the network connections established through that process are likely to persist and to be used on future occasions. The knot metaphor tacitly assumes one kind of organizational continuity not found in temporary organizations such as film units, and dismisses the existence of another kind of enduring connection based on networking.

Chapter six explores the distinctive nature of film units, and considers whether or not they are learning organizations. There is a discussion about expertness in film units, based on Benner's (1984) model. The ways in which film and theatre history condition learning in units are addressed. The chapter offers recommendations and suggestions for future research, and concludes by suggesting why film units are unique.

CHAPTER SIX

HOW TEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS UK FILM UNITS LEARN

Learning and knowledge accumulation are not outcomes, but paths that lead to outcomes. Thus, looking for evidence that a project team has stored its knowledge somehow may be the wrong model in learning and knowledge assessment. (Anell & Wilson, 2002, p. 184)

This chapter begins by considering whether or not UK feature film units are learning organizations. Then the impact of film and theatre history on contemporary UK film units is assessed, as are notions of expert status on units: these factors profoundly influence learning and knowledge in units. Future research is suggested and recommendations are presented. Chapters three, four and five have suggested that UK film units are special kinds of temporary organizations. This chapter ends by saying why.

6.1 LEARNING ORGANIZATION THEORY

Management in action is complex, cause and effect relationships difficult to establish and the predictive validity of theory low. (Starkey & Madan, 2001, p. S8)

Why examine learning organization theory and models in function of UK feature film units?

Film production in the UK is a chaotic, complex and rapidly changing sector fraught with risks but also presenting rich opportunities. Units are temporary. Since they have active life spans of less than a year, they demand rapid network, unit, team and individual learning. A biological analogy would be the use of flat worms or *Drosophila* fruit flies to study genetic traits - these are organisms with short life spans and rapid reproduction rates, so it is possible to consider many generations within a compact time frame. Film

units are somewhat similar: most individuals work on a unit for a matter of weeks and therefore on many units over the course of a year. A career in film production is made up of a succession of short-term contracts in temporary organizations. Opportunities for organizational and individual learning and knowledge transfer should be abundant: if learning organizations exist, they should flourish in UK film production.

This study has found that learning organization theory synthesises practice in enduring organizations: it is an output of scholarly consulting in organizational behaviour and organizational design. As a body of theory, it promotes notions about change which clients are able to accept and act on. Learning organization theory raises many issues that are relevant to film production, particularly when researchers such as Leonard (1992) discuss theory in function of bounded projects within larger organizations.

However, although units are deeply concerned with learning, knowledge production, knowledge management, problem solving and intellectual property, data considered in chapters three, four and five suggest that they do not fit comfortably within the learning organization paradigm investigated in chapter two. Temporary organizations such as UK film units invert learning organization theory in significant ways. Learning organization theory is not useful in promoting, predicting or managing learning in temporary organizations.

Film units are not learning organizations because:

- Learning organization theory tacitly and explicitly assumes that organizations are intended to endure. Film units are temporary by design, dominated by a variety of special considerations that emerge as a consequence of their temporariness. Their concerns are different from those of enduring organizations.
- Learning organization theory suggests that learning organizations explicitly value learning. Film units do not value formal learning, and experiential learning is only tacitly acknowledged. Units do not make paid time available for learning, finance contract workers' training, or reward formal qualifications. Formal apprenticeship

schemes are limited. Reflective practice is virtually unknown, with activities such as benchmarking considered irrelevant.

- Learning organization theory suggests that the pressure for learning in organizations is top-down. In film units, it is bottom-up.
- Learning organization theorists posit that learning organizations have unique properties that must be developed and cannot be purchased. Film units, entirely composed of contract workers, come into existence through the retention of people who embody, or can tap into, networks possessing such unique properties.
- Learning organization theory is concerned with codifying knowledge: making tacit knowledge explicit, storing it, and circulating it around the organization. Film units cultivate a specific type of *expert culture* and are about the minimal sharing of knowledge on a highly limited need-to-know basis. This idea is developed in 6.2.1.
- Learning organization theory is concerned with theoretical and practical knowledge. Learning in film units is almost exclusively experiential, with little or no contact with theory except as it directly facilitates operational matters.
- Learning organization theory stresses codified technical knowledge; film units emphasise tacit social knowledge. These are not mutually exclusive, but the emphasis is different.
- Learning organization theory posits learning as positive and socially constructive. Data from fieldwork suggest that learning in film units may lead to behaviours that are destructive, dangerous, immoral or illegal. Learning can also lead to anti-team behaviour, as with Ed's missing ice cream tub (5.3.5, "Competence"). Negative learning behaviours seem especially likely when units are on location.
- Learning organization theory is about moving stuck organizations forward. It is difficult for units to get stuck, although they occasionally run into difficulty. In extreme cases a unit may be terminated, but there is no scope for organizational immobility.
- Several theorists suggest that learning organizations are flat, non-hierarchical democratic organizations with an accent on personal development. Film units are hierarchical, authoritarian and undemocratic. They tend to be concerned with the

creativity of the few, not the many. There are highly complex and convoluted supply and staffing arrangements; they are far from flat.

- Many theorists maintain that the learning organization quest is fundamentally a spiritual one. However, film units are concerned with delivery, not transformation. They do tend to express the values of the producer and/or director, and these are not always positive, as with *The Crying Game* discussed in chapter four.

Learning organization theory does not map well onto the form or the functions of temporary organizations such as film units, which are epistemic communities heavily dependent on learning and knowledge – but not learning organizations. This outcome suggests that learning organization theory is incomplete, since it has been presented as a valid epistemological approach for any type of organization.

6.2 BEING TEMPORARY

6.2.1 LEARNING IN FILM UNITS

Working in temporary organizations such as film units creates a specific mind-set in contract workers. Work is intense and the pressure to deliver is high. Because every unit is so unique and so short-lived, reflective practices are not considered to be relevant. By contrast, only learning which may contribute positively to a freelance's immediate job performance is valued and pursued. Networking within and outside the unit is vital for satisfactory job performance and to secure future employment, since hiring decisions are made on the basis of personal recommendations. Units, and the individuals of whom they are composed, learn what corners can be cut given that units are dissolved after a matter of months. In chapter five, closure issues and health and safety were identified as problematic areas.

Experiential learning was universally acknowledged by participants in this study, and in secondary material, as the principal way in which people learn and advance within film

units. The ability to solve complex problems quickly, cheaply and elegantly is valued and often requires sophisticated individual and group learning. Decision making is routinely pushed down to the lowest possible level, so that individuals are compelled to take the initiative in problem solving.

Although units create, acquire, interpret and transfer knowledge and use it to modify individual and unit behaviour, knowledge cannot be retained within a temporary organization. As noted previously, temporary organizations leave contract workers, rather than the other way around. Knowledge is retained by individuals and embedded in industry-wide systems, practices and roles. Knowledge is also embedded in films themselves, which function in as archival documents with respect to the production processes through which they were manufactured.

As freelances move from unit to unit, their tacit and explicit knowledge moves with them, to the benefit of their new employers and their colleagues. People on units learn together as they work together.

Recruitment decisions provide ways of ensuring continuity, psychological comfort and competence. As with problem solving, they are often pushed down to the lowest possible level in the organization. Hiring decisions are made on the reputational assets of individuals and firms based on direct experience or word of mouth. The ability to work as part of a team is central to working on film units for freelances and for suppliers. In film units, notions of key skills and core learning are linked with teamwork skills and experiential skills gained on previous temporary units.

Units, which are temporary by design, arise and disband, but networks endure. Freelances are absolutely dependant on internal and external networks. These are uniquely collaged configurations developed over the course of a career, although there are also commonly shared aspects. Connections which initially form within units during (internal) networking

often become enduring relationships when parties no longer work on the same unit, transferring to the external network category.

The production office performs an important knowledge management role for the unit, acting as the hub of a wide range of networks and a centre for the integration of information. Various types of printed material (the script, schedule, call sheets and daily reports) demand co-ordination within the unit, and provide (or support) a shared sense of purpose. This idea is developed later in this section. However, most knowledge is not shared within units, which instead cultivate a special type of expert culture.

Chapter five has suggested that film units are conundrums, and certainly they challenge conventional perceptions of organizational behaviour. In writing about the connection between individual and organizational learning, Dr. Daniel Kim, co-founder of Pegasus Communications and an international consultant, teacher and facilitator with strong MIT and Senge connections (*The Executive as Leader of Change*, n.d.), has stressed the significance of tacit knowledge within organizations. He poses the following question:

Imagine an organization in which all the physical records disintegrate overnight. Suddenly, there are no reports, no computer files, no employee record sheets, no operating manuals, no calendars - all that remain are the people, buildings, capital equipment, raw materials, and inventory. Now imagine an organization where all the people simply quit showing up for work. New people, who are similar in many ways to the former workers but who have no familiarity with that particular organization, come to work instead. Which of these two organizations will be easier to rebuild to its former status?

Most likely, retaining all the people will make it easier to rebuild than retaining only the systems and records. In the first scenario, the organizational static memory is eliminated, but not the shared mental models of the people. In the second scenario, individual mental models and their linkages to the shared mental models are obliterated. Thus when new individuals come in, they have their own

mental models that have no connection to the remaining organizational memory.
(Kim, 1993, pp. 44 - 45)

The puzzle with film units is to understand how they can function in the first place. The way that film units come into being challenges Kim's understanding of continuity: units are instantly created without physical records, existing employees, or plant. Rather, new individuals and semi-permanent work groups (SPWGs) with outstanding groupwork skills cluster. Relying on tacit and explicit knowledge, created or acquired on previous units, and a key document, the script, they immediately bring into being, through high-speed networking and mental models shared throughout the industry, the temporary organization that is a film unit. As Ann said, "The script is the bible. It is passed through a lot of different hands and all the information for the shoot is broken down from this thing, broken down in different ways by different people. Everyone has their own system of coding.... It's the DNA of the [unit]." (1993, p. 12). Industry-wide shared mental models in film production are created and maintained principally through the recruitment and networking practices discussed in chapter five.

When I asked Tim what turned the individuals employed within the unit into a team, he said,

I suppose it's the script and the fact that most people have done it before and know what the form is. This is what makes it possible for freelancers to turn up on the day and start doing their jobs. Nobody has to explain.... [LL: So it's another iteration of a cycle that's familiar?....] Yes, they may need to read the script first.

[LL: Does everybody get a copy of the script?] Yes. (1996, p. 23)

Daskalaki and Blair (2002) mention Finley and Mitroff's reference to scripts as *consensual tools* "shared by project members" (p. 9). These are structures through which information is "analysed and shared between and among groups" (p. 9). They also cite Mangham in arguing "scripts can become carriers of socially constructed meaning or 'relatively pre-determined and stereotyped sequences of action which come into play by particular and

well-recognized cues or circumstances [of] which we acquire knowledge through the process of socialisation.” (p. 9).

Leonard (1995) has suggested that firms have tacit knowledge embedded in physical-technical systems:

Patents are not the only (or necessarily the best) way to protect firm-specific knowledge. The tacit knowledge of various experts that accumulates in firms, structured and codified over time, becomes embedded in software, hardware and accepted procedures. Because such compilations of knowledge derive from multiple individual sources, the whole technical system can be greater than the sum of its parts. The skill and knowledge of multiple experts (who need not have communicated with each other) are combined. Moreover, like a coral bed in the ocean, physical systems *preserve* the knowledge of individuals who have moved on to other functions, other jobs, other organizations. (p. 22)

Film units are not like coral beds. They do not preserve physical systems. Scripts, budgets, schedules, call sheets and daily reports all form part of a technical system which has been developed by multiple experts over time on a variety of temporary units. These systems and procedures are embedded in the film production sector, in the work experiences and life experiences of freelances, and they underpin film production. A single unit has not developed them, although they are expressed, tested, refined and refreshed through being used in successive temporary organizations. Changes, improvements and innovations to industry standard procedures become part of the mental model everyone who has worked on a given unit carries away and draws upon on subsequent occasions. Daskalaki and Blair (2002) point out “when these teams are dismantled, their knowledge is redistributed in the social-communicative environment in which they operate (‘industry spaces’).” (p. 16). Freelances in film production have the crucial ability to interpret sector stories and metaphors because of their deep understanding of common underlying systems.

In writing about transcultural knowledge management within consulting firms, Crucini (2002), briefly quoting Kostova, said,

When there is a process of transfer involving organizational practices or knowledge, as in the case of consulting, the success of the transfer is determined to a great extent by the transferability of meanings, values and knowledge. Indeed, such processes of transfer do not occur in a social vacuum but, rather, are 'contextually embedded' (Kostova 1999:4). (p. 110)

The ways in which knowledge is transferred from one film unit to another supports this point of view. Crucini also mentions knowledge management systems which partly depend on centralised codified knowledge, and partly on "the specialist knowledge of its consultants and therefore [the organization] generates its competitive advantage by combining intellectual capital and information technology" (p. 117). UK film units similarly combine intellectual capital and technologies, including information technology. Interestingly, information technology can prevent learning in units if strategies for circulating information are not put in place. Information is not necessarily automatically centralised in the production office as it was in the early 1990s.

Systems, and systems approaches, provide armatures that enable rapid learning in film units, allowing strangers to work together immediately and effectively. Learning is embedded in film systems, as well as within individuals and work groups. However, systems thinking can also underpin serious problems in film units: for example, the unsatisfactory attitude to health and safety described in chapter five.

UK film units are efficient learners, and epistemic communities. Learning is a core concern of these temporary organizations. The value of individuals and services to any unit that contracts them is in direct proportion to their ability to learn, and to their professional and personal networks within and outside the unit. Frederksen, Jensen and Dawids (2002) have argued of project-based learning that "the knowledge created or transferred during project work to a rather large degree is something happening in or strongly embodied in the practises and cognitive level of the participating individuals" (pp. 20 - 21), and this is true of learning in film units.

Argyris and Schön (1978, p. 12) call organizations “*holding environments for knowledge*” and suggest “such knowledge may be in the minds of individual members.” They say that organizations “*directly represent knowledge* in the sense that they embody strategies for performing complex tasks that might have been performed in other ways.” (p. 13). They describe organizational *theory-in-use*:

...the theory of action which is implicit in the performance of that pattern of activity. A theory-in-use is not a ‘given.’ It must be constructed from observation of the pattern of action in question..... Organizational theory-in-use may remain tacit because it is indescribable or undiscussable. It may be indescribable because the individual members who enact it know more than they can say and are unable, rather than unwilling, to describe the know-how embedded in their day-to-day performance of organizational tasks.... Whatever the reasons for its tacitness, an organization’s theory-in-use largely accounts for its identity over time. (p. 13 - 14)

This passage reflects my fieldwork impressions of how film units operate. In addition to the individual identities film units demonstrate, the UK film production sector as a whole is a system with an ongoing identity, which is created through its theory-in-use.

The sector functions as a meta-holding environment for knowledge, with units and networks being macro-holding environments and individuals representing the micro end of the continuum. Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm (2002) have suggested that organizational life can be regarded as:

...a collection or series of more or less coupled projects. One project may lead to another, but more often different projects have different roots, and the challenge for many organizations – and many persons – is to find some order and relationship among them. Such relationships among projects are accomplished either by connecting projects with each other or by distancing and disconnecting them in order to maintain each project as a separate endeavor. (p. 17)

In this regard, the entire feature film production sector could be described as *projectified* although I prefer to think of the sector as a locus of temporary organizations and dynamic networks supported by a somewhat more permanent infrastructure.

Film production is not much talked about: it is action-based, experiential. It was notable in conducting fieldwork interviews that participants did not have stock answers to the kinds of questions I was asking about their work experiences. They were enthusiastic contributors to this study, but at times struggled to describe activities in which they engage regularly, and this fits the Argyris and Schön (1978) quote above.

Film units are bonded by an absolute, transparent, common sense of purpose and a defined lifespan. This is unusual. In temporary organizations, long-term missions or strategies are irrelevant. All film units have the same goal: to deliver a final print on time, within budget and to pre-specified quality standards. Jones and Hendry (1992c) have said:

Mission + goals = purpose. The organization is thus able to use this simple formula to integrate all the characteristics of what seems to make up a learning organization in its purest form. (p. 48)

These vital elements do integrate the various strands of the unit, although as discussed above, this does not mean that units are learning organizations. Shorter-term missions taking place within units are either directly related to learning required in connection with an aspect of the film that is being produced, or initiated by individuals as part of personal strategies for career development.

In *Qualitative Methods in Management Research* (2000), Evert Gummesson, Research Director of the School of Business at Stockholm University, has written about the ways in which historical analysis can be counter productive: "The business executive has been compared with a car driver who looks in the rearview mirror and decides how to drive on that information." (p.103). He goes on to say,

History, then, represents a fixed point that creates security, whereas deviations from established practice may create anxiety. History becomes a defensive routine that prevents adjustments being made. Consequently, I avoid history and instead try to uncover the future. (p. 105)

Film units are new, greenfield-like organizations which assemble without previous histories. Individuals have work histories; the roles they undertake within units (*director of*

photography or production manager, for example) have histories with protocols and procedures; the members of SPWGs have histories with one another; units freelances have previously worked on have histories; the sector itself has time-honoured routines and protocols, but every new unit starts on day one with a blank organizational slate. All personnel are explicitly recruited from scratch for that particular unit. There is no shared communal past to function as either burden or security blanket. Daskalaki and Blair (2002) have described “an alternative organisational space that is continuously recreated every time teams come together.” (p. 16).

6.2.2 EXPERTNESS IN UK FILM UNITS

In considering *how* people who work in UK film units learn and do not learn, and *what* they learn and do not learn, I examined learning issues in another profession: nursing. In the forward to Dr. Patricia Benner’s *From Novice to Expert: Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice* (1984), Myrtle Aydelotte (Executive Director, retired, American Nurses Association) enquires, “How can processes, principles and situations be combined so that learning is more holistic and relevant? How can learning be facilitated so that knowledge of situations, rather than the laborious application of abstract principles, will be used with increasing frequency in...decision making?” (p. vii).

These are questions that could never be asked about learning within film units. Entrants to film production do not begin their careers by attempting to apply abstract principles to their work on units. Their learning is experiential. It is only at senior levels that freelances may distil their experience of units into principles, although this seems uncommon. The exceptions to this rule may be the relatively rare individuals who have formal qualifications in film, such as a degree in directing. However, chapter five makes it clear that freelances who bring an academic, theoretical approach to their work in units are not credible. As Don said of a freelance with formal qualifications but no track record in units, “Won’t take a chance on him, then.” (1996, p. 35).

In her chapter "Identifying and Describing Clinical Knowledge," Benner (1984) suggests that nursing experts draw on their "fund of past similar and dissimilar situations" (p. 41) and that less experienced nurses learn by watching them do so. Beginning nurses bring a group of clinical models to their practice, but as Benner points out,

The linear nursing process model can actually obscure the knowledge embedded in actual clinical practice because that model oversimplifies and necessarily leaves out the context and content of nursing transactions. Nursing is relational and therefore cannot be adequately described by strategies that leave out content, context and function.... It is possible to describe expert practice (Kuhn, 1979, p. 192), but it is *not* possible to recapture from the experts in explicit, formal steps, the mental processes or all the elements that go into their expert recognition capacity to make rapid...assessments. (p. 42)

Working on a film unit is also relational, but there are important differences between the ways that nurses learn, and how learning takes place within film units.

All newly qualified nurses have followed a fairly standardised course of study, the content of which senior colleagues will be more or less familiar with, despite the professional disagreements which Benner (1984) mentions in her chapter twelve, "Implications for Career Development and Education" (pp. 173 - 194).

By contrast, there is no automatically shared novices' knowledge base within any production role or across jobs within a film unit. Instead, this study has described a variety of entry routes into film production work, most of which involve no formal study or qualifications. Benner (1984) says, "Experience-based skill acquisition is safer and quicker when it rests upon a sound educational base." (p. xix). Starters on film units do not usually have such an advantage. Caves (2000, p. 99) describes an educational move for "non-acting crafts" in the USA towards "film schools at several universities and specialized institutions, mostly located in Los Angeles and New York, where [students] could interact directly with the film production process." In his view, this is a direct result of the termination of "assembly-line production on the studio lot" (p. 99). He implies that formal

education is a second-best alternative for film production entrants, who would be better served by learning experientially from the start. Freelances working on UK units would agree.

Benner (1984) assumes that experts have, over the course of many years of practice, experienced, through personal contact with cases, most technical situations that newcomers are likely to encounter. This is not necessarily, or even, perhaps, frequently, true in film production. The unique demands of each script mean that everyone (or nearly everyone) on a unit may simultaneously encounter phenomena for the first time whether they are beginners or experts: digital production technology and practices, for example, at present. In film production, an expert's knowledge may be the thinnest of veneers - a production manager with a single film's worth of working with pythons or pyrotechnics or in Panama may be regarded by everyone else in the unit as an expert.

Using a five-stage model, Benner (1984) says of experts (her fifth stage):

The expert performer no longer relies on an analytic principle (rule, guideline, maxim) to connect her or his understanding of the situation to an appropriate action. The expert...with an enormous background of experience, now has an intuitive grasp of each situation and zeroes in on the accurate region of the problem without wasteful consideration of a large range of unfruitful...solutions.

Capturing the descriptions of expert performance is difficult, because the expert operates from a deep understanding of the total situation; the chess master, for instance, when asked why he or she made a particularly masterful move, will just say: 'Because it felt right.' 'It looked good.' (pp. 31 - 32)

According to this definition, other than being expert at working within film units, or technically proficient with a department (such as the director of photography or a carpenter, for example), in Benner's terms there are often no experts on film units. At times there may be entire units composed of people who are less than novices, given that all may lack an understanding of the objective attributes of the situation and may not have context-free rules to guide their actions.

In film units, unlike the nursing profession, what anyone can be assumed to know in the context of a specific film is uncertain. Beginners cannot assume that more senior unit members have personal or exact knowledge of the conditions or situations that are to pertain on a given film. Although seniors will possess specific technical competencies (i.e. a production manager will know how to use spreadsheet software and how to cost a feature), have deep knowledge of how units operate, and sophisticated groupwork skills, they may not be familiar with all that hiring hundreds of elephants with mahouts, or organising permissions to film in a small Canadian city, or whatever, may entail. In a similar vein, senior unit members cannot assume that juniors will have had the same grounding as themselves, or that their department will share a knowledge base with other departments in a unit.

The success of a unit therefore depends on the abilities of its members quickly to determine what needs to be known, to figure out who knows what within the unit, and to network internally and externally to learn enough to fill the important gap(s) adequately. In film production, knowing how to learn at speed and how to operationalise one's knowledge seems much more important than the retention of any specific information, which, after its immediate use, may become irrelevant, or stale, or both, immediately.

This is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the existence and wide variety of specialist firms, sole traders and freelance individuals dedicated to servicing film, video and television production through the provision of expert skills and services which units may require only occasionally. For example, the 1997 edition of *The Knowledge* lists contact details for specialist riggers in diving-wire effects (stunt rigging) (p. 872) and for props rental firms such as Rentabook "for books, periodicals, newspapers and other printed matter - all languages and periods" (p. 641).

The quality of *all being in the dark together* described here is another reason why previous experience of working in units and excellent communication abilities are so important in securing work in film production. If you are familiar with the production

cycle, know how to learn fast, and can communicate well, you have some chance of covering whatever ground a given situation may demand.

Benner's (1984) model could be adapted for the world of film production. It would fit better if it were thought of as being triple stranded: one strand is to do with an individual's expertise in making features. This involves deep knowledge of units, and of groupwork practices. The second is to do with personal expertise within a unit role: as a clapper loader, a second assistant director, producer and so on. The third relates to the specific issues involved in making a given film, for example organising an elephant stampede. Every unit would thus comprise many experts in *how to work on units*, as well as a range of proficient colleagues, competent individuals, advanced beginners and a smattering of novices. Then there would be levels of role expertise. Finally, in terms of the specifics of a given film, the ratios could well be reversed, with a unit composed mainly or entirely of novices. Hierarchies of expertise in one dimension could thus be reversed in another. One could be an expert at elephant stampedes, but in one's first job as production manager, for example. The complexity of the expert/novice dichotomy in film production adds to the reasons why units are so demanding and exciting to work in.

These factors may account for the tremendous emphasis on recruitment practices in film units discussed in chapter five. Direct experience of working with an individual or a strong recommendation from a trusted colleague provides a way for those hiring to feel safer in an uncertain environment.

Benner (1984) points out that "one of the most successful retention strategies for the new recruit is a challenging first job...the more challenging a person's job during the first year, the more successful that person will be five or seven years later...one of the strongest predictors of later career success is a challenging, stimulating first job." (p. 201). In terms of the triple-stranded model I have proposed above, film units can offer even the most hardened unit veteran the prospect of a challenging new job. That is, film A may present a new opportunity to work with elephants, film B might involve stepping into a new role

within a unit, film C might offer a different kind of unit experience – working with a particular director - and so forth. In this sense, the thrill and challenge of being a beginner is never lost, or at least can easily be regained through choosing to work on units that extend one's experience in one or more of three dimensions. This may go some way towards explaining the addictive nature of working in units, and also the high quality of job performance by people who actively choose to keep coming back for more high-speed, high-pressure learning.

The worlds of nursing and film production seem more aligned when one considers the cycle of filmmaking described in chapter three. Each experience of a unit becomes a case for the freelances involved. Having worked on many units, experienced unit members perceive the gestalt of a given unit, and they are sensitive to nuance, having developed an idea or two over many years about what the runes might be and how they can most usefully be read. Benner (1984) says:

As Gestalt psychologists have long pointed out, the sum is greater than the parts. Also, the qualitative distinctions that expert clinicians make on the basis of their experience with many similar and dissimilar clinical situations cannot be transmitted by precise written descriptions. They are hard to teach too - for instance, differences in touch or feel - because beginners not only lack experience with "touch" and "feel" but also need procedural protocols and analytic strategies. The expert always knows more than he or she can tell (Polyani, 1962). The clinician's knowledge is embedded in perceptions rather than precepts. (p. 43)

In spite of describing film production in this study as a fly-by-night kind of business, if each film is considered as a single case, the number of cases freelances are exposed to in the course of a year is on average five, and probably not more than ten or twelve for those most in demand and on the shortest work cycles. Compare that number of cases with the numbers encountered by nurses, who must typically come across several (or in some posts many) new cases daily. It is clear that the opportunities for learning on an experiential case-by-case basis are limited in film units compared with nursing, although there may be a greater depth of learning on each film unit.

Benner (1984) explains how nurses develop “global sets” about patients:

Gestalt psychologists define “set” as a predisposition to act in certain ways in particular situations. Sets are accrued over time and may be even more elusive than the specific expectations or assumptions that are often apparent to the outside observer. Sets constitute the orientation toward the situation and thus alter how the situation is perceived and described. Sets can sometimes be uncovered, though they can never be completely explicit because the very act of making them explicit will change their function. (p. 7)

The film production sector could be described as sets within sets - each department within a unit has its own set, influenced by its head of department; each unit has a set, largely determined by the director or producer; and the sector has sets for film, television, video and so forth; as well as an overarching industry set.

Benner (1984) argues strongly for reflective practice in nursing:

A wealth of untapped knowledge is embedded in the practices and the ‘know-how’ of expert nurse clinicians, but this knowledge will not expand or fully develop unless nurses systematically record what they learn from their own experience. Clinical expertise has not been adequately described...adequate description of practical knowledge is essential to the development and extension of nursing theory. (p. 11)

An identical case can be made for UK film units. Introducing the concept of the reflective practitioner, and providing education, training and mentoring in this area is probably the most effective intervention that could be made to improve how freelances, and therefore units, function.

6.2.3 TEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS: NEW WAYS OF WORKING?

This era of full employment is coming to an end. It is still the dominant mode overall but other ways of working, such as permanent freelance work...have

emerged as viable alternatives. In several creative industries, these alternatives, many quite informal, are how the majority manage their work....

The reliance on individual knowledge and creative talent, and the specific job requirements of many creative industries, result in a high demand for people who are available at a moment's notice. (Howkins, 2001, pp. 132 -136)

According to Howkins, as companies in the ordinary economy "become dependent upon the creative.... They copy Hollywood's 'temporary company'.... They copy its simplicity; its promiscuity; its bravado." (p. 173). It seems that film units may be prophetic forms of organization, pointing the way to radical ways of working in the twenty-first century.

Film units are known to function across organizational boundaries, and it seemed that through studying them the relationship between learning in temporary organizations and industry-wide learning could be considered. Film units can be thought of as extreme examples of concepts such as *outplacement* and *core business* which became mainstream during the 1990s. Many large British organizations, the BBC for example, shed staff in order to reduce their business to a much smaller nucleus of key players and key functions, thus moving closer to a film unit model of staffing.

Economic historian Professor Tracy Davis (2000) says:

Always London-centric in its aesthetic influences, production became by the end of the century almost totally centred in the metropolis....The trend was towards creating more of an out-housed system rather than drawing ever-increasing numbers and kinds of specialized labour together into a single plant. In some respects, the industry spawned specialized manufacturers taking advantage of a niche to explore their comparative advantage in stand-alone firms.... Less and less of the preparatory work was done in-house, and more and more of its assembly occurred at a later point in the production process.³

The kinds of labour involved...are dependant not just on the organization of the production process but also, crucially, on changing technology. Always labour-

intensive, ...[the industry] benefited from successive new technologies that saved time, cut jobs and reduced expenditure. (p. 310)

Davis is not referring to UK film production at the beginning of the 21st century. Instead, her book, *The Economics of the British Stage 1800 - 1914*, offers an analysis of 19th and early 20th century UK theatre production as a cultural industry. The technologies she refers to in this passage include the switch from tallow, oil and candles to gas, and the advent of electricity, "the two revolutions in lighting that took the theatre from a system little changed since the advent of indoor recreations in the Tudor period but which, by the Edwardian years, represents fully modern techniques." (p. 310).

At present, film production is following an uncannily similar path to the one that theatrical production took more than a century ago. In both instances, technology is central. Digital technology and the internet look set to revolutionise the film industry, saving time, cutting costs (and jobs) and reducing expenditure.

Davis (2000) points out that the production of 19th century entertainment was difficult to classify as a business, and involved complex networks of suppliers:

Is it retailing, manufacturing or service? - while from the perspective of its constituent specialists it is even more complex.... These cases offer more than just anecdotal evidence of how late the theatre remained anomalous amongst British businesses in fair treatment of employees, but also show how legally, metaphorically, and practically entertainment as an industry was unclassifiable even when the 'labour saving' benefits of technological innovation improved its quality. The labour itself demonstrates this conundrum.

The production staff that creates whatever is necessary to make a show represents a spectrum of artisanal manufacturers and skilled craftspeople.... From outside the theatre, they contract with bill posters, printers, publishers, iron mongers, basket workers, silver and gold leaf applicers, glaziers, mercers, and fancy goods suppliers of all descriptions. (pp. 312 - 313)

Her evidence, drawn from a variety of sources such as an 1865 account of a Drury Lane pantomime, describes industry structures, practices and issues which are still recognisable as concerns in UK film production today. For example, she describes the 19th century trend towards sub-contracting:

The labour process transformed during the course of the century. Sub-contracting represents the major shift, reflecting not only the kinds of work undertaken within a theatre but the flexibility of capital in reapportioning overheads. As in engineering and shipbuilding, 'Manufacturers sought to avoid the worst effects of booms and slumps by assuming, directly or indirectly, the dual roles of producer and consumer' through specialization.²⁷ Empirical analysis shows how this was an investment strategy profoundly affecting who was employed and the organization of work.²⁸ While this is partly a matter of how the stage operated, especially how the creative chain of command functioned to put on a spectacle,²⁹ the socio-political and economic organization of the work is equally germane. The daytime work within theatres diminished as successive part of it were farmed out.... Comer refers to the vogue for spectacle integrally with the farming-out of work to independent entrepreneurs who set up businesses to contract labour that was formerly carried out within the theatres' walls. (pp. 315 - 316)

This tendency has been mirrored in UK film production. The spiralling costs of film production and the volatility of the international marketplace for film have provided the contemporary impetus to push risk, in so far as possible, outside the film unit.

Davis (2000) notes that along with other 19th century industries in London's tertiary sector, such as shoemaking and silk weaving, "theatres were converted from in-house workshops with versatile labourers to assembly points for components largely manufactured elsewhere."⁴⁴ (p. 321). With the demise of the studio system and the resurrection of independent production since the 1970s, trends in British film production have been very similar, allowing for the differences between live theatre and film. When Davis says, "By sub-contracting work, theatre companies' research and development efforts need only focus on the play scripts and mise-en-scènes.... No longer stocking

costumes and scenery meant that as plants with prime real estate, theatrical premises could shrink.” (p.322), she describes an attitude to research, development and premises which is familiar in film production and has been demonstrated in London during the 1990s and into the early 21st century by independent producers working with little more than a pile of scripts and a telephone. The first-time producer of critically acclaimed UK feature *Welcome to Sarajevo*, Graham Broadbent (Berardinelli, 1997, p. 1), for example, conducted most of the negotiations to produce that film from a communal telephone in the corridor of his bedsit (Jim, personal communication, 1995).

Davis (2000) explores how “the material products of theatre-making functioned as goods” (p. 348), particularly the foreign trade in dramas, explaining the crucial importance of exporting texts to the 19th century British economy:

Producers kept personnel and stock at home and simply exported designs and encrypted mise-en-scènes to authorized affiliates - usually in Australia, the Cape or Asia - to produce full-scale duplicates of what audiences had seen in London. This significantly extended the lifetimes of West End shows by innovating in transportation and distribution of theatre as a *purely intellectual product*. By exporting theatre to the empire as an intellectual product, the original producer’s utilization of a wholesaling phase improved the cost-benefit ratio. (pp. 348 - 349)

Through recording technology, film has logically extended this process, enabling producers simultaneously to have the same stars performing all over the world and engaged in making their next films. As Davis says,

While it might be the case that cinema is more competitive [than live theatre] because of its superior entertainment allure, it is definitely true that it is more competitive because of its superior manufacturing, distribution, and retailing capacities. It effected tremendous economies of scale in the years prior to 1914. Theatre’s limitations to reproducibility, and logistical impediments to circulation, were ingeniously mitigated in the period but this pales compared to cinema’s potential.... The chain from manufacturer to producer, distributor, and exhibitor took some time to work out - ‘The old system of selling the individual copy, which

meant ceding a piece of property' significantly 'replaced by *the temporary concession of the right to exhibit*'⁷⁹ - but it was an impressively efficient network provided that enough films came into the marketplace.... No wonder that, by the end of 1910, there were 2,900 cinemas in Britain, and 5,000 by 1914.⁸⁵ (pp. 356 - 357)

Blair et al. (2001) argue:

To more fully understand the present state of employment in the film industry, it is necessary to place current forms and trends of employment in their historical context as a means of understanding their development and thereby their current state. (p. 5)

Far from being radical new developments, temporary feature film units have strong, documented antecedents stretching back to at least the middle of the 19th century. Davis' (2000) work suggests that many of the issues central to film production today were important in 19th century theatre: technology, networking, and the international exploitation of texts, to name three. Chapter three demonstrates that temporary film units have been a persistent feature of film production in the UK since the late 19th century, even during periods when British studios were at their most powerful. Before that, highly networked contract culture was characteristic of British theatre production, which in 19th century London had many strong parallels with the 20th and 21st century film production sector now clustered there.

Blair et al. (2001) say,

Forms of employment evident in the film industry do form an extreme example of existing trends towards 'flexible' labour markets but are not underpinned by fundamental, epochal change. There remain many continuities in the employment relationship and in the organisation of work in the film industry as well as these more extreme features. (p. 3)

and Davis' (2000) research supports this.

6.2.4 SUMMARY: BEING TEMPORARY

This section has demonstrated that when film units learn, what film units learn, and why they learn it is as significant as how they learn. UK film units have radically different learning agendas and priorities to other organizations where experientially based professionals collaborate. Far less can be assumed between colleagues in film production. Indeed, film units seem to represent the antithesis of a shared knowledge base. In such a context, the importance of semi-permanent work groups and network-based employment practices becomes more understandable. One thing that nursing and film production do have in common is a deep reliance on tacit knowledge, and Benner's 1984 concept of sets transfers usefully into the arena of film production.

Referring to the importance of antecedents, Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm (2002) say,

In-depth studies have led to a strong awareness of the fact that projects vary.

Variations follow from differences in tasks, but perhaps more importantly, from differences in context, history and process. Even though projects are temporary organizations, they spring from historical processes and from the specific contextual circumstances in which they develop. An important topic for analysis, then, is the way in which projects are related to those contextual conditions....

One must be cautious in formulating general normative how-to models for running a successful project. (p. 13)

A preliminary historical analysis suggests that temporary organizations in UK film production exist because form follows function. It is likely that many significant aspects of film units, including various working practices, have 19th century or earlier theatre and entertainment roots. In this important respect, temporary organizations in film production may be unique, and therefore different from temporary organizations in other sectors of the economy, which have been created within the last decade without specific industry precedents, to maximise profit and minimise risk. Ekstedt (2002) says,

There are long traditions of project organized activities in for example the construction sector. The work methods have been transferred from one generation

to another. Other industries are looking for new methods of how to work in projects. (p. 79)

More needs to be understood about how UK film units are similar to and different from other temporary organizations before useful generalisations can be attempted.

For example, Frederiksen and Lorenzen (2002), writing in *Experimental Music: Innovation, Project Networks, and Dynamic Capabilities in the Danish Pop Music Industry*, suggest that temporary projects in the music industry “rarely develop the same strong informal institutions (such as trust and shared communication codebooks) that characterize [sic] more stable networks like supplier networks or strategic alliances” (pp. 1 - 2). As chapter five demonstrated, this is not true of UK film units, and it would be interesting to know whether this variance arises because of differences between projects and temporary organizations, differences between music and film production, differences in national practices between the UK and Denmark, or for other reasons.

6.3 FUTURE RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.3.1 OTHER TEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

This chapter has suggested that temporary organizations require the development of specific bodies of epistemological and economic theory. It would be useful to identify other sectors populated with significant communities of temporary organizations. Possibilities include the theatre, music, festivals, publishing, political campaigns, construction, aeronautics and shipbuilding.

6.3.2 TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION

There is scope for longitudinal studies of initial technology implementation in respect of the introduction of digital video to UK film units. Implementation and the management of

implementation are creative learning processes, with successful implementation being the result of the mutual adaptation of technology and organization (Leonard-Barton, 1988).

6.3.3 PROBLEM SOLVING, NETWORKING, AND NETWORKS IN UK FILM UNITS

The UK feature film production industry has exceptional problem solving and networking abilities, which are expressed through freelances, SPWGs and units. Research directed at understanding more about how these abilities are developed and utilised may be important. Networks are also worthy of study, being of at least equal significance with the units they underpin

6.3.4 THE HISTORY OF INDEPENDENT FILM PRODUCTION IN THE UK

This research has touched on the history of film production, and also 19th and 20th century theatre, as a way of explaining structures and behaviours in film units today. Very little has been written about the early days of film from a production perspective. It is likely that pockets of documentation exist in the UK. Furthermore, there must still be many people living who were involved in independent production from the late 1930s onwards. Collecting living histories and conducting interviews to add to existing knowledge of UK film production practices is a real possibility.

6.3.5 THE APPOINTMENT OF UNIT ARCHIVISTS

Perhaps The Film Council or a research body would fund a series of research posts called something like 'unit archivists' on selected UK films to document in various ways the processes and histories of production from managerial and technical points of view.

6.3.6 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

The ideal researchers into UK film unit matters would be participant observers, and it might prove possible to recruit suitable individuals as part-time researchers, especially at the senior end of the scale. As freelancers with well-established credibility, their access would be superb. However, units are lean, and it is difficult to imagine how such individuals could fulfil demanding unit roles and simultaneously conduct research. Perhaps this could be addressed through research design.

6.3.7 FILM COUNCIL TRAINING INITIATIVES

In film units, little is known about reflective practice. Crucini (2002) quotes Sarvary as saying that ““qualitative improvement in knowledge creation can be gained if the synthesis, the integration of the firm’s experience is done centrally”” (p. 119), and at present this is unknown in film units. Special attention should be given to developing independent learning/study materials and specialist internet sites to support reflective practice at every level in film units.

6.3.8 GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Individual units, fundamentally instrumental, are not able to achieve an overview of the industry. Because the sector is comprised of temporary organizations, only government, through the agency of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport or quangos such as The Film Council, is positioned to make industry-wide interventions. Blomquist and Söderholm (2002) have pointed out that:

Management ideas do not necessarily flow easily or automatically. They need to be actively applied by organizations, and thus it is necessary for them to be translated or adapted for local conditions. Such flow is facilitated when interaction among organizations is frequent and intensive, thus providing many openings for the transformation of ideas. If institutional mechanisms, such as strong normative or

mimetic pressure from government or professional associations, are present as well, the flow is further facilitated and accelerated (cf. Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall (2002:26-ff). (p. 27)

Government should support further research in order to understand more about how film units function and about temporary organizations - topics of potential strategic importance for the UK.

6.4 THE ONE-SHOT DEAL: UK FILM UNITS ARE DISTINCTIVE

A script poses unique problems. Problem solving necessitates learning. Well-established industry-standard production systems, practices and conventions provide the structures, systems and routines that enable effective learning in UK film units. These include scripts, schedules, daily call sheets, and various standard reports, all prepared and co-ordinated by the production office, the hub of the unit. These facilitate rapid learning and the transfer of knowledge from unit to unit and within units, enabling strangers to work together immediately and effectively. Learning is embedded in these systems, as well as being embodied in individuals and work groups. Such knowledge tends to be tacit and non-codified. Reflective practice is not considered economic: there is no direct, immediate benefit to the unit that budgets time for reflection.

Film units are epistemic communities, but not learning organizations, falling outside existing epistemological theory. Contrary to the belief that certain networking capabilities must be developed within organizations over time and cannot be purchased or contracted, film units are temporary nexus of contract workers retained in great part for their intense connections to fields of practice and their embodied knowledge. In UK film units, access to such capabilities can be hired because individual freelances are so deeply embedded in the sector.

There are important differences between projects and temporary organizations. Projects tend to fall into one of two categories. Either they are time-limited and task-limited

subsets of enduring organisations and resourced from within their host. Or they are collaborations amongst enduring organizations, each of which contributes resources to a common effort. In both scenarios, projects are embedded in a matrix of enduring organization(s). Therefore, projects have aspects that are far more permanent than organizations as temporary as UK film units are. However, although film units are temporary *one shot deals* they also have characteristics (networks, for example) that are more enduring than most projects and many permanent organizations.

The value of freelances and service providers to temporary organizations such as film units is in direct proportion to their capacity to learn, to know and to transmit their knowledge. Every unit has three assets: its contract workers and suppliers, its script, and the funds secured to realise the script. Each element has networking implications, and draws on embedded systems and routines. Alliances and networks are key in film units. Freelances often learn with and through such connections. In addition to personal learning, there is group learning, unit learning and network learning. Intangible assets are not only non-codified subject or technical knowledge. Access to networks is also intangible, and also vital.

The combination of being temporary and producing cultural texts conditions most aspects of organizational life and style in UK film units. They are an extreme and idiosyncratic form of temporary organization designed to thrive in climates of radical change.

7.1 APPENDIX A: SAMPLE FIELDWORK INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Management Issues in Film Units: Research Questions

1. Own the problem and solve it:

- A. Are there 'typical' problems that come up in film units?
- B. If yes to A, what are they?
- C. If yes to A, who 'owns' each one?
- D. If yes to A, how are they solved?
- E. Tell me about a major problem you recently encountered during a production.
- F. Whose problem was it?
- G. How was it solved?
- H. Was the solution satisfactory?

2. Creating an extended enterprise: virtual research through networking:

- A. Is there agreement that some film units are better (or worse) than others?
- B. Is it usual for film units to compare their performance against other companies?
- C. If yes to B, how is this done?

- D. Have you ever done this?
- E. How do you know what expertise exists out there? What are your fact-finding mechanisms?
- F. Are there information networks?
- G. If yes to F, do you use them? Do others in the unit/company?
- H. If yes to G, how and how often?
- I. Do you have regular suppliers whom you carry over from one production to another?
- J. Do you develop your suppliers?
- K. If yes to J, how?
- L. Do you develop projects jointly or collaboratively?

3. Challenging the status quo:

- A. What qualities do you look for when you hire/contract individuals/suppliers/sub-contractors?
- B. What qualities were you hired for?
- C. What opportunities exist for staff advancement within a given production?
- D. From production to production?
- E. How important is an individual's position within the hierarchy?

- F. How is this expressed in practical terms?
- G. Is performance ever rewarded in ways other than the payment of salary or fees, i.e. bonus schemes, profit sharing, points, share-holding, etc.?
- H. Is the status-quo ever challenged during production?
- I. If yes to H, how?
- J. If yes to H, can you give an example?
- K. Can you give an example of a management risk taken during a recent production? How did it work out?
- L. What is the biggest mistake you have ever seen made in a film unit/production company? How was it dealt with?

4. Garnering and integrating knowledge

- A. How do people who work in this area improve their performance and increase their own knowledge?
- B. Do cross-functional roles exist within film units/production companies?
- C. If yes to B, is there training to support this?
- D. Is there on-the-job training during production?
- E. Between productions?
- F. Are apprenticeship schemes run during production?
- G. What is your own educational/training background?

- H. How are communications structured in film units?
- I. What other ways does knowledge and information circulate around the unit?
- J. How do people let others know what they are doing or what they have done?
- K. Do you assess what was learned on a particular production? How? Can you give an example?
- L. If yes to K, what would you have done differently as a result of what you learned?
- M. If yes to K, was this learning carried over to subsequent productions?
- N. Does each film unit/production company have a unique set of guiding values?
- O. If yes to N, can you give examples? How are these communicated to the crew?

5. Groupwork

- A. What is it like working with people in this business? Competitive? Collaborative? Some other way?
- B. Can you give an example?
- C. Within the unit, whom do you regard as 'management'?

- D. What is it that turns the many different individuals who have been recruited for different skills and abilities into a team? Can you give an example?
- E. How does a good/bad team function? What is it like being part of a good/bad team?

6. Vision

- A. Has there been a shared sense of purpose in any of the film units/production companies you have worked for?
- B. If yes to A, can you describe it?
- C. If yes to A, how was it created?

7. Personal learning

- A. What did you set out to accomplish on your last production? How did you do?
- B. What do you want to accomplish on your next production? How do you plan to accomplish this?

8. 'The Crying Game' (or 'Four Weddings and a Funeral')

- A. What do you remember about making 'The Crying Game'/'Four Weddings and a Funeral'?
- B. Were there any outstanding incidents?
- C. What was working on that unit like?

9. General

- A. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your job or about working in film units/production companies that you think I need to know or would find interesting?

7.2 APPENDIX B: LIST OF FIELDWORK DOCUMENTATION

(Within categories, materials are listed in date order.)

***Loaded* (working title *Bloody Weekend*) production observation**

Bloody Weekend: Notes from a day of observation at Breakspear House, Harefield, Thursday, 16 September 1993. (1993a). (11 pp.).

Notes from a second day of observation of the *Bloody Weekend* film unit at Breakspear House, Harefield, Wednesday, 20 October 1993. (1993b). (11 pp.).

Seminars, meetings and training

Notes from Dov S-S Simens two day film school: Successful producing: making movies and money. 3 - 4 September 1994. (15 pp.).

Notes from a one day seminar: Movie money: Where it is and how to get it. 5 September 1994. (12 pp.).

Notes from a New Producers' Alliance Seminar: Partnership - the road to success. Royal College Art. 1 February 1996. (2 pp.).

Notes from a meeting with Ben Gibson, Head of Production, British Film Institute, 19 September 1996. (2 pp.).

State of the Art PACT/BFI Seminars (1996)

Trainspotting, 21 January 1996. Panellists: Danny Boyle, director; Andrew Macdonald, producer; John Hodge, writer; Angus Finney, moderator. (2 pp.).

3 Steps to Heaven, 4 February 1996. Panellists: Constantine Giannaris, director/writer; Rebecca Dobbs, producer; Ben Gibson, head of production, BFI; Angus Finney, moderator. (2 pp.).

Blue Juice, 18 February 1996. Panellists: Carl Prechezer, director/writer; Peter Salmi, producer/writer; Allon Reich, assistant editor, drama, Channel 4; Angus Finney, Moderator. (5 pp.).

Restoration, 10 March 1996. Panellists: Andy Paterson, producer; Rupert Walters, writer; Angus Finney, Moderator. (3 pp.).

Land and Freedom, 17 March 1996. Panellists: Rebecca O'Brien, producer; Sally Hibbin, executive producer; Angus Finney, Moderator. (4 pp.).

Small Faces, 14 April 1996. Panellists: Gillies Mackinnon, director and co-writer; Steve Clark-Hall, co-producer; Mark Shivas, head, BBC films; Angus Finney, moderator. (3 pp.).

Backs to the future? Which ways forward for British cinema? 21 April 1996. Panellists: Simon Perry, Chief Executive, British Screen; David Aukin, head of drama, Channel 4; Nik Powell, producer; Ben Gibson, head of production, B.F. I.; Elizabeth Karlsen, producer; Angus Finney, Moderator. (4 pp.).

Transcripts

Transcript of an interview with Jim, Production Manager, 22 March 1993. (60 pp.).

Transcript of an interview with Ann, Producer, 27 August 1993. (66 pp.).

Transcript of an interview with Bob, Production Manager, 11 November 1993. (28 pp.).

Transcript of an interview with Sue, Production Manager/Co-ordinator, 12 June 1996.
(38 pp.).

Transcript of an interview with Pam, Production Co-ordinator, 22 June 1996. (38 pp.).

Transcript of an interview with Tim, Production Manager, 17 July 1996. (35 pp.).

Transcript of an interview with Kay, Production Executive, 7 August 1996. (34 pp.).

Transcript of an interview with Huw, Director of Photography, 20 August 1996. (27 pp.).

Transcript of an interview with Don, Location Manager, 12 September 1996. (51 pp.).

Transcript of an interview with Ed, Production Manager, 30 January 1997. (37 pp.).

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